



AGE OF COSMIC EXPLORATION

BOOK 02

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Age of Cosmic Exploration

(大宇宙时代)

by

Zhtty

Synopsis

Endless sky and infinite space, the cosmos isn't some paradise waiting to be found, it is full of darkness and danger, death and terror of the great unknown. However, for that glittering swath of blue, we have no fear! For the longevity of men, we have no regrets! Nothing shall stand in our way because it is finally our time, our age! The age of cosmos exploration!

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Chapter 101: A Conundrum

The discovery of the UFO was quickly treated by Yao Yuan to be the Hope's foremost secret, bypassing even the secret location of the ship's store of atomic weapons. Simultaneously, Yao Yuan tightened the security around the central mainframe, increasing the previous 50 unit patrol to a 200 unit patrol. He also added the robots Bo Li had returned to the security unit, with some directly assigned to secure the hidden cache.

"Yes, I'm certain that we're looking at a UFO. The fact that it is floating without aid confirms that it is the same UFO that the US government found, because man doesn't have the technology to create something this advanced!"

Yao Yuan announced, in a firm voice that brooked no argument in a room where a secret meeting was held.

The attendees of this secret meeting included members of the Black Star Unit, who were present during the discovery, engineers, computer scientists, explosives experts, and a group of scientists led by Bo Li.

Currently, on a screen embedded into one of the room's walls, a private documentary on the US government's initial discovery of the UFO was being played. The raw video files were taken from the central mainframe.

"...As all of you know, this UFO escaped our analytical prodding. Its metallic casing... Actually, I'm suspicious of whether the casing

is actually metallic, because our team until now is still unable to get an exact reading of its chemical make-up. But, as they say, seeing is believing... This UFO has a round casing that is silver in color, and that casing has the reflective quality and feel of a metal... So what else could it be?" said a scientist, with the UFO hovering in the background.

Suddenly, a few robed assistants appeared on the screen to set up several devices around the metallic ball.

"Everyone, what you're seeing now on the screen is the UFO under 10 times magnification. You can see that it has no grooves and is incredibly smooth...

"Now we're increasing the magnification to a 100 times, and the image looks the same...

"And 1,000 times magnification...

"...Now 2,000 times magnification...

"Alright, you might think we are duping you by playing the same image over and over again, but I can assure you that they are all different. And we are as confused as you are. But what I can say for certain is that this thing is 100 percent well beyond our current scientific comprehension...

"And with that in mind, we will continue to increase the magnification... What you're seeing now is at a 2,000,000 times

magnification, and it still looks the same as before...

"Finally, I will present to you the image taken under our most powerful laser microscope. Its magnification power is at an unbelievable 300,000,000 times magnification because this microscope is normally used to observe items at the atomic level...

"As you can see, there is no evidence of protons, neutrons, or electrons. It is just a smooth surface... This is a material that we have not seen before... It violates our most basic chemical and physical laws..."

All of the scientists in the room watched the documentary with increasingly stunned expressions. Some of them were so taken by surprise that they didn't notice that they were drooling.

"Dear viewers," the scientist in the video continued, after wiping the tears in his eyes. "I have nothing more to say. If you are still unclear about what we have discovered, please refer to the memo that I've given out to you before this video. Everything we know about this thing is on there. And this ends the current sessions. Sorry, there will no Q&A after this because I'm too exhausted preparing for this conference..."

With that, the screen turned black. It was followed by a line of English, stating the year and date of recording. After that, another wall of text appeared, declaring the unfortunate death of the scientist three days after appearing on the video. With a will and no suspect, his death was ruled as a suicide.

As the video drew to a close, the many attendees of the secret meeting, with the exception of the group of scientists, looked at one another with puzzled looks in their eyes. The many scientific terms and implications referred to in the video flew right over their heads. They also didn't understand the relevance and reasoning behind the scientist's suicide. Ebon asked the people around him why the scientist committed suicide. He intended for a whisper but his booming voice was heard by everyone.

"...In a way, the scientist committed suicide out of despair. Just imagine, after you have been blinded, silenced, incapacitated, and left in a locked room to die, wouldn't you search for an early release as well?" sighed Yao Yuan.

"But I don't see how the two are related," said Ebon. "I understand your premise. Indeed, in the case you described, it's understandable for there to be a desire to seek self-inflicted death, but doesn't the scientist in the video appear healthy?"

"It's easy, that's because the world he lived in operated on the basis of science... When this ultimate source of meaning crumbled, it was like the light of his world was cruelly shut down. Trapped in despair, he could see no other way out but death," explained Bo Li.

Ebon shrugged and responded rather condescendingly. "I still don't get it."

"That's fine. I just hope that our group of scientists on the Hope isn't as fragile as this scientist in the video," Yao Yuan said as he cast worried glances at the scientific community members that were in the room.

The truth was that Yao Yuan had seen this video before on his own when they first secured the Hope. Like Ebon, he was initially unaffected by it until he got more familiar with the workings of the Academy. Then he realized the true impact the video could have on students of science.

"Let us collect our feelings for the next documentary..."

With the press of a button, another scientist appeared on the middle. This scientist was in his middle age and looked more collected and inspired than the previous scientist.

Nevertheless, he had the same look of despair in his eyes as his predecessor when he talked into the camera, "I've been fielding many question regarding the circumstances around the lead scientist that held this post before me, and there are many about the reasons for his suicide... To be honest, I too had the same hopeless thoughts crowding my mind when I saw this UFO, but somehow I survived. In any case, I see that there are new faces among us, and so let me start by explaining what this UFO's smooth metallic outer casing represents.

"First, I believe everyone here has basic knowledge about atoms, so I will only provide a cursory introduction. Everything, including metals, is made up of atoms, and each atom consists of subatomic particles, protons, neutrons, and electrons. Take for an example my wedding ring. It looks solid, but at the atomic level, there are many spaces between the atoms that make up this carbonate."

Right then, a window appeared on screen beside the scientist displaying the structure of an atom. A proton sat in the middle while electrons and neutrons circled around it.

"The picture you see on the screen is an enlarged image of an atom. As you can see, there is a lot of empty space around the proton that sits in the middle. From the perspective of atomic science, 99 percent of any given atom, and thus all objects, are empty spaces. There is energy between an element's atoms that helps to keep its atoms at a fixed distance. This energy between atoms both attracts and repels one another to maintain the specific chemical construct of an element. Therefore, protons from different atoms will not come into contact with one another if there is no application of external force. And this law is true for all known substances on Earth.

"This UFO, on the other hand, is something else completely. If you can remember from the images shown previously, the surface of the UFO, even magnified at the subatomic level, is completely smooth. There is no evidence of any protons, electrons, or neutrons. The empty space normally occupied by mobile electrons is noticeably missing..."

The scientist paused for a long time before finally adding, "So, even though the surface casing of this UFO looks and feels like a metal, it defies identification because it is nothing like anything we have on Earth. I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you if you came here with the intention of finding out what this thing is, because... we, the scientific community, can't provide the answer. What I can say for certain is that the technology behind this UFO... based on its surface casing alone... is at least thousands of years, or even more, ahead of our current technology.

"I've heard people tried using lasers, explosion, quakes, and even atomic fission to crack this open, but they were all to no avail. In fact, they were unable to scratch its surface. However, if you still want my opinion from a scientific perspective on whether there is a way to open it, my answer to you is...

"Unlikely!

"You have to understand that this is an impossible metal with no spaces at its atomic level. It literally couldn't be broken apart. The only logical hypothesis we have regarding the nature of this metal is that it is one that is made up from a tight weaving of protons and nothing else. This is what we can call... a protonic element!

"Sadly, I have no idea how such a protonic element could come to be, or in fact, how this UFO could defy the laws of existence." The scientist sighed. "We humans are as backwards as primates, no, as unicellular organisms before this UFO's technology. But I have to inform everyone who is now present and all future viewers of this recording...

"...To not waste energy or time forcing this UFO open. Unless the UFO is willing to open on its own, using our technology to force it open is akin to a child trying to put off the sun by shooting at it with a water gun...

"It is an impossible conundrum!"

Chapter 102: Artificial Intelligence

The UFO shocked not only the batch of scientists when it was first discovered, it also had the same shocking effect on everyone present when it was rediscovered 10 years later.

Yao Yuan was the one most unaffected by the videos, not because he wasn't astute enough to appreciate its importance, but because the shock had been dramatically decreased after multiple viewings of the two videos.

Only Yao Yuan and Guang Zhen were left in the room after everyone else left hugging a file of confidential information. The two men sat silently across from each other before Guang Zhen finally caught Yao Yuan's eyes and asked, "Couldn't we open it by overwhelming it with computer viruses like how the government first got it to open?"

"No idea, but it is definitely worth trying." Yao Yuan sighed. "Actually, I harbor a personal speculation... something about this UFO's computer system. Assuming that its information processing unit works like a conventional computer, I believe its computer system has some sort of artificial intelligence."

"Isn't that a given?" Guang Zhen replied, with a quizzical look thrown at Yao Yuan. "It's impossible that something this technologically advanced doesn't come fitted with artificial intelligence."

Yao Yuan though shook his head, "Of course you're right, but I'm

referring to an artificial intelligence that is more complicated than the ones we know, something that could qualify this UFO as an electronic organism."

"What do you mean by that?" Guang Zhen asked, with confusion wrinkling his brows.

"You've seen the video on how Earth's governments got this UFO open, right? They bombarded it with a blast of computer viruses. While any one string of those viruses is fatal to the computers on Earth, aren't you suspicious about... the fact that they would work on this ship's mainframe when the difference in technological level is so big?"

Yao Yuan stood up, walked about, and added, "I've seen the videos myself, but I haven't really given them much attention. After all, we didn't know this UFO was actually on the Hope... Of course, I have always harbored a suspicion that it could be on the Hope, but I thought that there was no way the government officials would leave such a valuable thing behind on this spaceship.

"My own suspicions aside, let's talk about my conclusion after watching this pair of videos... Indeed, access to this UFO was granted after a continuous attack of computer viruses, but it only stayed open for about three hours, right?

"Within that period of time, the government officials retrieved from within a set of alien remains, and most importantly, they downloaded information from its mainframe, the technology to produce and operate crucial systems like the anti-gravitational and

space-warping technologies.

All that took coincidentally about three hours. After that, the door to the UFO closed, and no matter how much they kept hacking the ship after that, it would not open. This was all explained in the videos."

Yao Yuan sat back and looked squarely at Guang Zhen before adding, "Based on that, I've come up with a hypothesis... After the alien, for some mysterious reasons, passed away, the ship stayed buried at Tennessee for perhaps millennia until it was discovered in the 20th century. However, the AI within was not receptive to our presence then because man's technology was too inferior at the time.

"It was only in the 21st century, after our own advancement in computer science, that the AI awakened. It is my belief that while we thought the viruses were harming the ship, from the AI's perspective, we were playing with it. After all, this has been its first outside contact after many lonely decades. Perhaps as rewards, it opened the door to give us access to some technologies as gifts. It has remained closed after that because it's already tired of the same old viruses and is waiting hopefully for something new."

Disbelief was written across Guang Zhen's face when he replied, "Ol' Cap'n, isn't that a bit too... science fiction-esque? We're talking about a piece of machinery, granted one with technology that is much better than ours..."

"And that's the reason why!" Yao Yuan interjected. "Could

prehistoric humans imagine what an airplane looks like? Could they have drawn the picture of a spaceship? We are the prehistoric humans when compared to this UFO... and in fact, I fear we might be more regressive than that.

"Other than that, I have seen a piece of evidence that has greatly increased my belief in this hypothesis."

"What evidence?" shocked by this new revelation, Guang Zhen quickly asked.

"Do you still remember the cables that are connected, no, melted into the UFO?" Yao Yuan asked. "Our current technology doesn't have the capability to do something like that. The wiring connected both the mainframe and the UFO seamlessly. In other words, the processing units for both the Hope's mainframe and the AI are inextricably connected!"

Guang Zhen suddenly looked left then right before whispering to Yao Yuan, "But the UFO's alien owner is confirmed dead, right? Does this mean the AI is acting with its own consciousness? Then, doesn't that mean it has been spying on us all this while, or worse, it could possess control of this ship if it feels like it? In other words, the biggest threat of our survival at this moment is a sentient AI?!"

Yao Yuan waved his hands, telling Guang Zhen to calm down, explaining, "I don't think it's that bad. Since it has always been there, there have been plenty of occasions for it to harm and obstruct us if it wanted to, but the fact that it hasn't means that... at least for now, it means us no harm."

Suddenly, the world became silent for Yao Yuan as pieces of clues fell into place. He stood there dazed for about 10 seconds until he saw a worried Guang Zhen moving to give him a shake, to which he replied, "Ol' Wong, let's say the car that you're driving suddenly gains artificial intelligence, what would you do?"

Caught by surprise, Guang Zhen stuttered, "That... that would be great. I could leave all the driving to it. I only need to tell it where to take me."

Snapping his fingers, Yao Yuan added, "And what if this car suddenly opens its doors when you are stopped by a group of gangsters?"

Guang Zhen looked at Yao Yuan weirdly, answering, "What else? Of course I'll get out of the car to take care of them! What, do you expect me to call the police?"

"..." Yao Yuan stared at Guang Zhen with a speechless expression before finally sighing. "Fine, let's put this in another way. If you're Zhang Heng, what would happen to you in that situation?"

"I'd probably die." Guang Zhen considered before adding, "And if my life is spared after I've handed over all my valuables, I will probably write a strict letter of complaint to the car company. I will also stay away from using cars with AI in the future. Who knows, they will probably drive me off the cliff next time since there is evidence of them actively harming their passengers' lives..."

"Exactly!"

Yao Yuan snapped his fingers again, saying, "We've missed an important detail!"

"Oh? What detail?" Guang Zhen asked as he revised what the two of them had discussed.

"That alien body!" Yao Yuan said firmly. "For a technology this advanced, I don't think they would set heavy restrictions on their AIs. Building on what you've said, without direct orders from its owner, it will not simply open the door, because that will actively harm the safety of its owner. Even after its owner is dead, its main mission should shift to preserving the owner's body and not allow some outside influence to come in to claim its owner's body..."

"With that in mind, I have a revised hypothesis."

Yao Yuan stood up once more, and as he wandered about, he elaborated, "Ol' Wong, as you know, I'm an all-rounder, this means that I have some of the power of a Thinker. Just now, a logical inference was formed in my mind, and I find it to be incredibly interesting... We might have on our hands a newborn AI!"

"Listen. Perhaps this ship originally had a powerful AI, but the bigger possibility is that it has a dynamic computer program that is able to learn and grow. But even so, it is still a written program, a type of lifeless machinery..."

"However, as time passed, and we have no idea how long this UFO has been hibernating on Earth, this AI has slowly learned and evolved. Eventually, it came into sentience and gained an awareness of self. And with the exception of a physical body, it has no difference from you and me.

"When man came across this UFO and siphoned the viruses into it, they were weak enough for this newborn AI to treat them as toys. And in the midst of this playing, it picked up upon our mannerisms and culture. Finally, as rewards for giving it such fun toys, it allowed us access to its technologies. And it has been passively waiting for the next interaction after that..."

Here, Yao Yuan took a meaningful pause, and a surprised expression crossed his face. He finally added, "Maybe this AI is still a baby. Since it's new to the world, it has a curious disposition to experience everything. However, restricted by the unfamiliarity of its surroundings, it is fearful of stepping out of its comfort zone. Ever since it found itself on the Hope, it only dared to fuse itself to the central mainframe and, from the safety of the hidden cache, observe us from afar..."

"That is my final hypothesis!"

"This is a newborn, sentient artificial intelligence!"

Chapter 103: Countdown for 10 Days

After the discovery of the UFO was treated as the Hope's top secret, everyone who knew of it was warned to not leak the information. This combined with the added security around the central mainframe helped Yao Yuan feel at least relaxed about its safety.

Nevertheless, he retained a certain insouciance regarding the UFO's discovery, since even if someone on the Hope bore it evil intentions, there was nothing they could do to harm it. The UFO was indestructible.

As mentioned before, the key difference was technology. With a chasm in technology as big as theirs, Yao Yuan suspected that even if they could somehow get the UFO to open, the technology within would be out of man's comprehension. Imagine the prehistoric man being granted the technology of brick-laying. Would that help them construct a better shelter? Theoretically, yes, but practically, no. They wouldn't know how to decipher this technology, and the same could be said of man on the Hope and this UFO.

Because of this reason, the spaceship junkyard they were closing upon became that much more important. Yao Yuan believed that with a thorough study of the junkyard's technology, man's technological level could increase tremendously within a few years. And that gave him a spark of hope.

Due to its increasing importance, the Hope's surveillance on this junkyard had been ordered to not cease. Now that they were only 10 days away from the destination, the Hope's 24-hour surveillance

managed to pick up more things than they were able to before.

First, it was obvious that the technology behind the UFO was levels ahead of the technology that resided in the spaceship junkyard. This was evidenced from the fact that the Hope could still make educated guesses on the junkyard's situation, like providing a reconstructive model of the original battleship, but they couldn't make heads or tails about the UFO.

And how far ahead was the UFO's technology? The answer was... unknown. A complete unknown. Not only was its material unknown, the technology it contained was an unknown as well. An unknown that stretched across several tens of thousands of years in technological difference!

Therefore, even though the UFO could be said to be the Hope's trump card, it was a card man currently couldn't show. Yao Yuan believed that he might not even live long enough to see the mysteries of the UFO revealed, so he perceived it as his biggest present for the Hope's future generations.

The thing that could really help the Hope's situation then was the spaceship junkyard that was teasingly within grasp. It was the source of a better technology that man could get their hands on!

When the Hope was 10 days away from the junkyard, the news quickly spread among its citizens... and this was all thanks to the Hope Weekly that printed a big, red numeral "10" on its cover page, initiating the official countdown!

The three men who were responsible for that decision could be found in an internet café playing Star Craft 3.

The café was situated on the Hope's 3rd level Barracks and was drastically different from the establishments that they usually visited. With the sole exception of Xiao Niao, Qiu Qiu, and Dan Dan, the rest of the café's patrons were either quietly doing research or reading web-novels. No one was playing games, and the trio was the café's only source of commotion.

That was why they had opted for a private room. The space only had three computers, and the price was at least a 100 times more expensive, but it was still better than being given the evil eyes every other minute.

"Hey, not fair! The two of you are working together to attack me! Stop using Zerg to speed rush me! This is so unfair!" groused Xiao Niao, with more than a hint of taunting and teasing in his voice.

Qiu Qiu and Dan Dan snuck a look at one another before laughing slyly as Qiu Qiu retorted, "What! We're called Zerg for a reason, and it's your fault for randomizing the Protoss race. We're not dumb enough for you to reach late game. So surrender quietly and leave the battling to the pros."

Xiao Niao surrendered in a fit of complaints and then created a new server to start another round. After Qiu Qiu and Dan Dan were added to the server, a window popped up saying that another ID by the name of ZERO had joined their server. The trio was taken aback and instinctively looked at each other.

"Well, looks like we have a new challenger. We finally found another gamer," said Dan Dan, who was the first to recover. He reached over to a pack of biscuits that sat on the table and started laughing.

Xiao Niao and Qiu Qiu, though, were still in shock. Qiu Qiu even went so far as to twist his body around to peer outside of their private room, saying, "Wait, this person is playing outside? Isn't he afraid of being assaulted by a mob?"

Xiao Niao, however, breezed through the concerns, adding, "Who cares? Isn't this the best set up? Team death match, 2 versus 2, so now no one can complain. In case you two say I bully you, I'll volunteer to be in a team with this ZERO. And... game start!"

Amidst Xiao Niao's carefree laughs, another round of Star Craft started. After the loading screen, Xiao Niao realized that he had randomized Terran and Zero got Zerg.

"Not bad at all. One to zerg and another to provide mid-game support. This should be fun," Xiao Niao told himself, not caring that his friends could hear his haughty laughs.

And... Xiao Niao lost again. If not for the law that prohibited destruction of public property, Xiao Niao would have slammed the keyboard... He was angry, but not to the extent that he would toy with the idea of two to five years behind bars.

"Damn, this ZERO is such a noob! What Zerg player focuses on

rushing tech tree and completely disregards the team comp!? The freaking enemies consist of a Protoss and a Terran! Yes, they aren't going to rush, but what tactic consists of not building any close ranged units?! And what's the point of building so many infestors?! Is your late-game going to be stronger than the Protoss' and Terran's?! What a noob!"

Xiao Niao was almost growling at that point. Even after tagging ZERO as a noob, he was still fuming. He typed in team chat to confront ZERO, lecturing him on the right way to zerg.

To his surprise, ZERO replied almost instantly.

"...Star Craft 3 is not meant to be played like that," came ZERO's reply.

"Then tell me, if the game is not about tactics using the three races' weaknesses and strengths, what the hell is it about? As Zerg, you either go for early rush, mid-game zerg, or late-game macro. Tell me I'm wrong," Xiao Niao typed in return.

"...The early stages of space wars should be focused on survival, pooling all your resources to create an environment to ensure that your civilization can have long-term survival. After that, your focus should shift to expansion. There are two halves to expansion, with the first half focusing on the expansion of human resources, supplies, and mapping. With that completed, the second half of the expansion should focus on technological expansion...

"As this wormlike Zerg organism, you could steal other

civilizations' collected technology through mind-controlling infestation. This is impossible in real life, but if this is possible, the expansion stage should be switched. You will need to focus on stealing others' technology first and foremost, while base and supply expansion can be put on hold as long as your base is not under serious threat," ZERO replied.

Reading these replies, Xiao Niao swore he could feel an aneurysm coming. Smacking his keyboard, he fired back, "Please, bro, this is Star Craft 3, not Civilization 7! The main aim is to demolish your enemy. Why are you making it so complicated?!"

"...Bro? Have I said I'm a male?" ZERO replied.

"...What?! Don't tell me you're a she? I have never seen a female play Star Craft 3 before!" Xiao Niao was close to pulling his hair out. He was certain that this ZERO was nothing more than a troll now.

"...Female? Male?"

ZERO disconnected from their server after typing this last reply, leaving behind a speechless and raging Xiao Niao. His friends were trying their hardest to not burst out laughing as they witnessed their friend being mercilessly trolled by this noob.

"Damn! You noob, who leaves without saying gg!? Now I'm sure you're a she, because only a woman could do something like that!" Xiao Niao typed furiously, not caring that there was no longer anyone on the receiving end. Then, he turned to look at Qiu Qiu

and Dan Dan.

"You two can stop laughing now!" Xiao Niao added, with a cruel glint in his eyes as he created a new server. "Come, I'm going to go for my strongest pick next! Get ready to be zerged! I'll make you two noobs bow down to my gaming superiority!"

"You're on!" Qiu Qiu said as he slapped Dan Dan on his shoulder, adding, "I'll pick Terran and go for a bunker rush. Dan, you pick Protoss and have your workers build proxy base next to mine. I'll defend and you focus on your tech tree; we'll definitely crush him!"

"Great!" Dan Dan cheered as he chewed down on another piece of biscuit.

The trio then spent the rest of the day lost in the joy of playing Star Craft 3. Of course, by the end of it, all three of them had forgotten about this mysterious ZERO. The only exception was Xiao Niao, who was left with a bitter taste in his mouth from being trolled by a noob.

Chapter 104: Dream Team

With the passage of time, the Hope floated closer and closer to the junkyard, and finally there were only nine days left to their journey. It was on this day too that Yao Yuan revealed the 12 members of the scouting party.

First, the team was led by Yao Yuan even though many objected to it, including his Black Star teammates and Guang Zhen. They wished he wouldn't risk his life so willfully, especially when the Hope still needed his leadership. Nevertheless, their advice fell on deaf ears, his retort being that even if he perished, the Hope still had Guang Zhen, the acting captain, to lean back on.

Furthermore, he was the most powerful among the 12, both in terms of Homo Evolutis capability and military skills. As the all-rounder, he was the obvious selection for the leader position. With him leading, the success rate of the exploratory missions would greatly increase.

The rest of the team members were Zhang Heng, Ying, Liu Bai, Lee, Ebon, Fei Biao (Black Star Member, Perceptor), Xie Xiao Yan (Black Star Member, Perceptor), Peng Huai Shi (Black Star Member, Perceptor), Wa Luo, Ren Tao, and Chou Yue.

In other words, with the exception of Guang Zhen, all the Black Star members were participating in this mission. Both Ren Tao and Chou Yue were also requested to join as respectively the Thinker and the Diviner.

"...Ol' Cap'n, isn't this too much of a risk?" Guang Zhen asked, with concern wrinkling his brow as he looked through the member list.

Guang Zhen's concern was shared by many on the Hope, including the many committee leaders and even the newly appointed second lieutenants.

One of the problems was that even though Yao Yuan was clear that Guang Zhen would be his successor, that decision was not one that was unanimously accepted by the citizens of the Hope.

For one, after his heroic deeds on both the meteorite base and Planet Sahara, Yao Yuan's position as the Hope's de-facto leader became firmly unchallenged. For another, even though he held absolute military power, his policies had proven time and again to be humanistic and inclusive. Finally, he wasn't ethnocentric, for he showed appreciation for other cultures and encouraged inter-cultural assimilation.

Compared to Yao Yuan, Guang Zhen was a traditional military man. There was a clear hierarchy in his mind when it came to policy-making. He was prone to having a condescending attitude towards people that he considered being a station lower than him, and with the exception of his Black Star mates, those people was everyone else on the Hope. Many westerners and some Asians were put off by this to the extent of being apprehensive of his leadership.

While Yao Yuan was still around, they were mostly fine with Guang Zhen being the second in command, because they knew that

most policies still came from Yao Yuan.

However, after Guang Zhen officially took over as the captain of the Hope, things would be a lot more different... Because of that, after the member list for the exploratory party was revealed, many came forth with objections. They were adamant that Yao Yuan not participate in this mission, and they were also concerned about whether it was wise putting all their eggs in one bucket with all 12 members of the party being Homo Evolutis.

"I understand your worry."

Yao Yuan sat in central command, going over the member list once more. "Ol' Wong, you're worried that the list is too weighted, right? First, with me dead, the Hope might face political upheaval, and second, if the team was to perish, half of the Hope's known Homo Evolutis will disappear alongside it as well. Those are your concerns, right?"

Guang Zhen hesitated before finally nodding and sighing. Sitting down across Yao Yuan, he added, "Ol' Cap'n, you know as well as I do that I'm not politician material. For the sake of the Hope, I behoove you to reconsider the candidate for your successor."

"What is there to reconsider?" Yao Yuan lifted his head to catch Guang Zhen's eyes. Laughing, he stood up and walked over to Guang Zhen. Patting him on his shoulder, he added, "Guang Zhen, regardless of your political leaning, there are two things about you that make you the best successor candidate. Your kindness and your reliability, those are the qualities that the rest of the Hope has yet to see."

"Your reliability ensures that you will not instantly roll back current policies. Even though you might have opposite opinions on some of them, for the sake of stability, I believe you will make sure that they remain effective. Secondly, your kindness ensures that you will not draft draconian policies. These two qualities alone make you a more than qualified leader. Plus, stepping into this post will change you. You'll learn from experience and I'm sure you'll only get better at it."

Yao Yuan smiled, "That's why you are the best candidate. The all Homo Evolutis line-up though, I'll admit, is rather risky."

"However, isn't the fact that we're in space itself a big risk? Every step we have taken even before leaving Earth was risky. Every day we're taking some sort of risks. We can't let that hold us back. For the sake of a successful mission, this risk is one that I am willing to take," Yao Yuan confessed.

"Furthermore... We really do need this success."

Yao Yuan circled back to his chair and sat down, sighing. "There has been a series of roadblocks since our adventures on Planet Sahara, then the nebula, and finally the meteorite base. It is obvious that such a long period of distress has introduced frustration and fear in the citizens of this ship. Within these two months, I've received reports that people are forming new religious groups. The tenets for these groups are very basic, but their aim is to find reasoning behind the series of misadventures. The majority of them says that these are trials given by God to test us sinners.

"I'll be frank. I'm very afraid... Religion is the manifestation of man's irrationality. If correctly guided, it can provide wonderful spiritual relief, but if wrongly used, it could cultivate cult mentality. When things escalate to an unruly stage, I will have no choice but to execute all followers of this cult. I do not see that sitting well with the rest of the Hope, but it is definitely something that has to be done. Therefore, to prevent that from happening, we have to stem these doomsday cults at their buds.

"To that effect, this 12 Homo Evolutis party is necessary."

Yao Yuan looked at Guang Zhen seriously and said, "There can be no margin for error. We must give this mission our best shot. Only with the success of this mission will people stop turning to these cults, and without public support, they will eventually die out.

"Ol' Wong, I've made up my mind, so you can stop trying to persuade me now. If you really want to help, help me maintain the peace on the Hope after I've departed for the mission."

Yao Yuan repeated the same speech to others that approached him with opposition. After several days of repetition, Yao Yuan finally convinced the ship that he was not going to back down from leading the party. Realizing his determination, the Hope shifted their effort to prepare for the worst.

"When the Hope is 1,000 kilometers away from the junkyard, we will stop to release a fleet of upgraded, pilotless mining airships. We will control the airships to get close to the junkyard's outer

perimeter to see whether they'll trigger any traps."

In the Barracks' war room, Yao Yuan elaborated as he pointed at the blackboard behind him using a cane.

"If no danger is triggered, the upgraded shuttle will be used for us to get closer to the junkyard's outer perimeter. This part of the operation will take about three days.

"After the shuttle reaches the outer perimeter, we will once again control the airships to move closer to the area with giant, floating debris. With deliberate care, the airships will be used to gingerly bump against the debris to ensure that their weapon systems have been completely shut down. If this step is also successful, we will move on to the next course of action, which is the one that is most vital."

Yao Yuan turned back from the board and looked at the ten something people gathered before him. "With me leading, the exploration party will enter this area to search for valuables to bring back to the Hope. Naturally, this mission will harbor all sorts of dangers, so while I'm gone, Guang Zhen will assume my position as captain of the Hope until my return.

"This concludes the briefing for the junkyard scouting operation. The members of this mission are myself, Zhang Heng, Ying, Liu Bai, Lee, Ebon, Fei Biao (Black Star Member, Perceptor), Xie Xiao Yan (Black Star Member, Perceptor), Peng Huai Shi (Black Star Member, Perceptor), Wa Luo, Ren Tao, and Chou Yue.

"Both Ren Tao and Chou Yue will be joining this mission as new military recruits in the ranks of Sergeant and as the Black Star Unit's reserve members...

"There are still four days until we reach our destination, so use the remaining time to train and rest adequately.

"Dismissed."

With that, Yao Yuan walked out of the war room.

Chapter 105: Prep-Work

Since Ren Tao and Chou Yue were siblings, they were given a shared residence. Due to limited housing on the Hope, this situation was unlikely to change at least until both of them were married.

Nevertheless, since both were in their teenage years, there were bound to be inconveniences sharing one bathroom and bedroom, especially since they were siblings of opposite sex.

Take showering for an example. Putting on clothes right after taking one was cumbersome because it trapped the moisture from the vapor within the clothing. It would be more comfortable if they could walk about naked or only wearing their bare necessities, but alas they weren't living alone or in a romantic relationship. On this issue, Ren Tao had it easier because at least he could walk about bare-chested since he was a guy, but the same couldn't be said for Chou Yue. One couldn't expect a girl of her age to be able to go about her everyday activities in only her lingerie in front of her brother.

Still, she was thankful that as inconvenient as it may be, she was sharing a living space with her adopted brother, the thought of having Ren Tao be some random stranger that she had to share lodging with brought upon some serious headaches.

At the end of the day, the inconveniences aside, Chou Yue was glad for such an arrangement. The mundane frictions from living in close proximity had brought much joy to Chou Yue even though she wouldn't admit it out loud. Sibling bickering provided her a

semblance of normality in a life that otherwise sounded like sci-fi.

Both Ren Tao and Chou Yue returned home straight after the mission operation briefing in the war room. After all, they were already exhausted from attending a whole day of training prior to the briefing. Furthermore, it was not like they had anywhere else to go to... With the exception of the biomes, which needed special clearance to enter, every corner on the Hope looked just about the same. If they wanted to stare at metallic walls, they might as well do it in the comfort of their own home.

"Good god! Finally it's over! Who knew military training could be so draining!?"

Chou Yue exclaimed as she jumped onto a sofa bed the moment they stepped into the door. After rolling about in it for quite some time, she yawned satisfactorily.

Ren Tao sat opposite her on a solitary sofa and groused, "Chou Yue, you're messing up my bed. Go sleep in your own bed."

Chou Yue turned to lie on her back and glanced haughtily at Ren Tao. "You dummy, it's only 5 PM. What am I to do if I wake up at dawn tomorrow? Stare at the walls?"

"Be my guest. Anyway, since we have three days of downtime starting tomorrow, you can sleep until noon if you want... I'm going to shower, so can you please prepare dinner in the mean time? I'm hungry." Ren Tao shrugged as he stood up.

Chou Yue might seem like the bossy one in their relationship, but she was also the one who was responsible for housework like cleaning and cooking. If their schedule allowed it, Chou Yue would prepare meals herself because she knew Ren Tao preferred not to eat out.

There was another reason why Chou Yue appreciated their living arrangement, and this could be seen from the fact that she started blushing after Ren Tao left to use the shower. Enveloped in the bed that still lingered with her adopted brother's body aroma, she blushed even harder.

(That dummy. We've been living under the same roof for almost six months now. How much longer is he going to wait?! He really is going to treat me like his actual sister if this continues. I can't allow that to happen. If he's not going to act, I suppose I'll have to. Okay, I'm going to make him confess his feelings to me within the next three days!) When Ren Tao came out of the shower, he was immediately attracted to a sweet and sour fragrant in their room. Rushing to the kitchen, he saw Chou Yue making roux for a pan of sweet and sour sauce, while on the table sat a plate of fried pork ribs. He squealed excitedly, "We're having sweet and sour pork today?! Yes! But why did you suddenly decide to make my favorite?"

Chou Yue smiled coquettishly. "Well, it's not common that we have off days. Plus, you have been going at it hard for the past few days. I figured a little reward is in order. Speaking of which, could you help me set up the table in the living room, dinner is almost ready."

During dinner, Ren Tao immediately went for a piece of his favorite dish after a mouthful of rice. In between mouthfuls, he praised Chou Yue's cooking effusively.

"Is that true? Then please take some more." Chou Yue smiled brightly in reply. Happiness blossomed in her heart as she sat watching Ren Tao wolf down her cooking.

After Ren Tao polished off half their dinner, Chou Yue asked sheepishly, "Ren Tao... We've spent the past few days training. It has been incredibly boring, so why don't we go to the biomes for a change of scenery?"

"The biomes? Tomorrow?" Ren Tao asked, surprised by the invitation.

"Sure." Chou Yue giggled. "I've heard people say they have farms and petting zoos up there. We've not seen living animals and plants for such a long time. Let's take a break and go there tomorrow."

"Can't."

Ren Tao rejected the offer outright. Taking another piece of the meat, he elaborated, "I have to go see Bo Li tomorrow. This has been set this up since last week, so I'll probably have to spend the next three days with her. Plus, since you're a sergeant now, I'm sure you can get into the biomes without my help, so why don't you go there on your own?"

"Bo Li!?" Chou Yue said the woman's name with gritted teeth. With an increasingly chilling voice, she added, "The hot scientist girl? 17 to 18 of age, small in build, cute face, the one people call stone-cold fox?"

"Stone-cold fox?" Ren Tao repeated, chewing over the unfamiliar term. He then shook his head. "That I haven't noticed. I suppose she is of a slight build, indeed she is smaller than you. Huh, I guess she's even smaller than me."

"I don't need the details!" Chou Yue reared up in anger, swiped the rest of the dinner, and retreated back to her bedroom.

"Wait, where are you taking the food? I'm still hungry," Ren Tao called after her.

"Then go eat s**t! I'm taking back what's mine... If you want some more, ask Bo Li to cook for you!" Chou Yue replied harshly before slamming the door in his face.

Ren Tao sat looking at what remained of his dinner with a stunned expression. He finished what was left on his plate and said quietly, "What did I say to anger her this time? I mean, she is taller than me and Bo Li; I thought she would be happy by that compliment. She didn't even give me the time to explain that it's because of the upcoming mission that I'm meeting with Bo Li."

Regardless, Ren Tao knew that he had pissed Chou Yue off, but he had no idea why... So, the day after that, he wandered over to Bo Li's lab to discuss the equipment they needed to prepare for the

mission.

He stayed until almost noon. At the entrance to Bo Li's lab, he crossed paths with Yao Yuan, to whom he merely nodded as acknowledgement. Passing Ren Tao, Yao Yuan arrived at Bo Li's lab to find her submerged in a pool of sketches and blueprints.

"Ren Tao wanted you to design some stuff for him?" Yao Yuan asked without preamble as he collected a stack of blueprints to study.

Bo Li narrowed her eyes at Yao Yuan, annoyed at his brazenness before finally replying, "You're right. He wanted me to design two things: a sturdy rappel belt and a frequency-stable communicator."

"Looks like we have the same idea." Yao Yuan nodded. "I suspected him to be here because I saw his sister outside in T-shirt and jeans as well as a baseball cap. I almost didn't recognize her. But back to business; I need you to finish designing and creating these two devices as soon as possible. We need at least 12 sets of them. Feel free to solicit help from other committees if that's necessary."

Bo Li nodded absently. She then walked past Yao Yuan to a metallic safe. After keying in the password, she retrieved a box and placed it before Yao Yuan.

"This is the thing that I promised you," Bo Li said nonchalantly.

Yao Yuan flicked open the box and nestled within was a weird-looking gun. Its barrel was way too long; it gave the impression that it came equipped a built-in silencer.

Bo Li continued, in a measured voice, "This is a lightweight gun that can pierce through heavy armor. Gaussian pistol prototype 1..."

Chapter 106: Aerospace Combat Suit

Prototype 1

The Gaussian gun felt hefty in Yao Yuan's hand.

Although, to be fair, what he held in his hand wasn't actual Gaussian weaponry. Those were still impossible for man at the time to make. What he had was a simplified prototype.

Actual Gaussian weaponry, or electromagnetic weaponry, destroys its target at the atomic level. Its projectiles create an electromagnetic vortex that disrupts atomic stability through the formation of bipolar magnetic fields.

The Gaussian prototypes created by Bo Li's lab were weak imitations. Using magnetic coils in the configuration of a linear motor, they formed accelerators that could shoot out projectiles at high velocity. The accumulative magnetic pulse formed by the succession of coils and small projectile mass added up to a high velocity bullet. Theoretically speaking, with the increase in voltage and decrease in projectile mass, the bullet could even reach light-speed!

And the faster the projectile traveled, the greater the damage it could inflict. According to experiments done by Bo Li's lab, the prototypes they had had a range of several tens of thousands meters. In other words, if its gunner had a good aim, he or she could incapacitate Earth's hardest tank from tens of thousands meters away with just one shot.

Needless to say, before it, even man's sturdiest armor vest was as flimsy as paper.

To conclude, even though the Gaussian weaponry created in Bo Li's lab wasn't at its optimum form, it could already deal immense damage to its target. That was the reason it was touted as the invention that would usher in the 4th industrial revolution!

Before they venture into the junkyard, Yao Yuan took time to predict all possible dangers that they could encounter. The biggest possibility was the threat of automated defense robots, not unlike the ones found on the Hope.

The reason for this assumption was the glowing bigger pieces floating among the sea of spaceship scraps. The fact that they still gave out a weak glow meant that they still contained energy, and it was not unlikely that this energy was strong enough to activate automated defenses. Based on the spaceship's technological level, those defenses would either be a robot fleet or immobile turrets. Either way, it was going to be a challenge for the 12 unit party... Yao Yuan feared the gap in the technologies might be too big for them to overcome.

Take for an example the best weaponry during the first industrial revolution, the flintlock. It was the best gun one could find at the time, but if faced with a gunner wielding even the worst rifle of the third industrial revolution, it would be nothing more than a piece of junk. That was the fear Yao Yuan had.

The presence of Bo Li's Gaussian gun was thus a calming salvo. Yao Yuan knew fights weren't won by confidence and bravery

alone. They needed actual firearms to back that up.

"This firearm uses the most durable metal among all the special metals created by the alien plant. Therefore, you don't need to worry about it clogging or exploding. The one aspect you need to worry about though is its energy preservation system...

"I've used the superconductive metal to make the magnetic coils, but I still can't find a good energy source. Several groups are working on a new battery design using the same superconductive metal, but there are still several technical issues we need to iron out. Give us another six months and I promise we can present to you the prototype 2," Bo Li concluded.

But Yao Yuan knew they didn't have another six months to wait. They were inching closer to their destination by the day; therefore, he holstered the Gaussian gun and left.

"...Bo Li, thank you... for your recommendation of that rice cakes stall. They were indeed delicious," Yao Yuan said as he stepped out of the room.

"Of course, you dummy... they are my recommendations after all..." Bo Li uttered after a while, surprised by the random comment.

Yao Yuan's next destination was supposed to be another science lab, but he believed the place would be deserted because it was lunch time, so he took a detour to the canteen.

Yao Yuan finished his lunch hurriedly and arrived at the other lab at around 1 PM. This was the bionic new material lab hosted by Ivan.

Yao Yuan feared he was too early because he hadn't spotted anyone on his way there. Therefore, it was to his surprise that he found Ivan busy arranging a huge stack of files on his table when he stepped into the lab.

"Captain, I didn't expect you to be here so soon. Sorry for the mess," said a flustered Ivan as he stood up to offer Yao Yuan a cup from the nearby dispenser.

Yao Yuan smiled kindly in return. He held a secret admiration for Ivan, the Hope's other whisperer, because not only did his brilliance save everyone on Planet Sahara, it was thanks to his chemical potion that the Hope would have access to the incredibly useful crystal reactors. This was not even mentioning the passion that he had shown when he used his life to protect the potion formula during the lab explosion. The fact that Ivan was still working while everyone else was out for a break further increased the admiration Yao Yuan had for this young man. Yao Yuan found his dedication commendable.

Yao Yuan accepted the water cup politely and smiled. "You don't need to be so courteous, Dr. Ivan. It's me who should be sorry for disturbing you. I heard from the patrols that you have been working late for the past month."

Ivan smiled bashfully. "My working hours are normally that long, so the added hours are nothing... Plus, Captain, you don't

need to worry about that affecting my performance. As the whisperer, many times I will subconsciously enter a working state even without the need to memorize important details. The power has wired my brain that way. Nevertheless, it is also thanks to this power that we're been able to finish creating these 12 new spacesuits within this past month."

Ivan then walked to a door that sat at the end of his lab. He opened it to reveal 12 silver spacesuits. Based on touch alone, they appeared to be thinner than the spacesuits they currently had.

"By mimicking the cellular arrangement of the alien plant, we are able to create this new spacesuit using the latest ceramic-embedding and nano-sewing technologies. This type of spacesuit is at least half the weight of our current one. Matter of fact, why don't you give one a try, Captain?" Ivan retrieved a spacesuit from the closet and handed it gingerly to Yao Yuan.

Because Yao Yuan had a part in the design of these spacesuits, he knew of their importance and worth. It had taken about six different scientific committees to produce these 12 spacesuits. The time, effort, and not to mention materials that were poured into just one of these spacesuits could buy a Boeing 747.

The moment the spacesuit fell into Yao Yuan's hands, he could instantly feel the difference in weight. Their current spacesuits, even though they were already one of the greatest inventions of the 21st century, weighed at about 40 kilograms each with the added accoutrements like liquid oxygen tank, communicator, and homeostatic systems.

This new spacesuit, even with all these built-in accessories, weighed at about 20 kilograms, and that difference could do wonders for its wearer's dexterity and agility!

Spotting Yao Yuan's surprised face, Ivan smiled proudly. "I'm glad you noticed the change in weight, Captain. Previously, that was our biggest hindrance when we traversed planets or asteroids with gravity, because strong gravitational force would weigh us down. However, with this new spacesuit, that worry is effectively cut in half. And this is done without taking out any of the important life support systems. Furthermore, an elastic material is used to pad the suit at its joints, so its flexibility is also much better than the ones we currently have."

Yao Yuan studied the spacesuit like it was some newfound treasure, which, in a way, it was, before finally asking, "How about its defensive capability?"

Ivan answered with pride suffusing his voice. "For that, we've borrowed much inspiration from the alien plant's cellular structure. We realized that their hexagonal cells are arranged like a beehive, and the distance between each one was highly calculated to provide the best durability. We used ceramic threads to create a similar pattern, and our lab experiment revealed that this pattern is so durable because it is able to effectively disperse the force at the point of impact. With the exception of a sniper rifle, whose penetration is too strong, other known bullets and projectiles are unable to harm the wearer of this spacesuit. Even the sniper rifle only managed to pierce half of the material."

"That is indeed great news! Thank you so much for your efforts."

Yao Yuan almost jumped up in joy. Caressing the spacesuit with a dazed look in his eyes, he added, "Like all new discoveries, let's give it a name. How about aerospace combat suit prototype 1?!"

Chapter 107: Arrival!

The final three days passed in the blink of an eye. Before anyone knew, the Hope had arrived at its destination, a spot about 1,000 kilometers away from the junkyard's outermost perimeter. The time was 4 AM.

Four hours later, the 12-member exploratory unit, Guang Zhen, a group of scientists, soldiers, and technicians could be found gathered in the Hope's command central. They were there to compare their notes and work on a plan. There, they also had access to footage from the Hope's surveillance room.

"10 mining airships will be deployed in 10 seconds."

With the completion of a countdown, 10 pilotless airships gently flew towards the junkyard.

The group of airships had everyone's attention. Through the security cameras that were attached to each of the airships, there were 10 screens in the room displaying each of the airships' point of view.

"They will reach the designated location in 20 minutes," Yao Yuan announced.

The airships moved sluggishly because their initial purpose was for close-ranged mining and gathering. Their singular purpose translated to a simplistic design, which simultaneously meant that they were disposable.

Their disposability made them the perfect candidates for this mission, as they were extremely replaceable. In comparison, the construction of an upgraded shuttle would take months and a boatload of supplies to complete. No sane person would use such a valuable commodity for this risky gamble.

As the 20 minutes drew to a close, everyone in the room held their breaths as they witnessed the airships moving dangerously close to the junkyard. Everyone had their eyes glued to the screens to see whether the airships would... pass safely or be destroyed.

The result was positive.

All 10 airships entered the junkyard safely. They continued deeper into the junkyard as they bounced smaller scraps out of the way.

"Nice!"

Everyone broke out in cheer. Feelings of hope, worry, fear, and everything in between had everyone by the noose moments before the airships entered the junkyard. Now, relief was openly written on everyone's cheerful countenance.

"Great, now we just need to order the airships to return..."

As the sentence was uttered, the screens that provided security feed via the airships went offline one by one... Within two seconds,

all 10 screens were off!

Yao Yuan reacted instantly, yelling at the technicians that controlled the airships, "Switch to long-distanced camera. Rewind to the time when the feed went offline, we need to see what happened to the airships!"

Soon after, the footage that was taken from the Hope's long distance camera appeared on the main monitor. There was no sign of the airships being attacked at the time their feed went offline. Even after the footage of the long-distanced camera was fast-forwarded to real time, the group of airships could be seen waddling safely deeper into the junkyard.

That had everyone in a grip of silence. They looked at one another with worried expressions until some of the scientists started dithering among themselves. Nevertheless, this development wasn't exactly shocking because losing control of the airships was one of the predicted outcomes. After all, with such a difference in technology, it would not be hard for the alien civilization to obstruct signals or even take over the airships.

"Check for signal interference! Begin analysis, stat!"

The few experts quickly went to work. They checked for errors by examining the airships' signal routing system. Hopefully, they could figure out the reason for loss of control there.

Sadly, there was nothing suspicious within the routing system. Although, to be fair, the experts couldn't promise the validity of

their result because it was highly possible that man's technology wasn't advanced enough to detect the hidden interfering signal.

That sunk the room into another bout of depressing silence before Yao Yuan ordered, "Send out another 10 airships. Remember to pay close attention to their control signal as they neared the problematic spot. I want to know what exactly went down. Get to work! I don't want to hear any objections or hesitation, because this must be done for the sake of our future!"

Many shared Yao Yuan's determination because they knew of the junkyard's importance. Unless it was certain that approaching the junkyard would spell the Hope's demise, they knew this mission had to be done, because the junkyard provided what the Hope needed the most at the time... technology! The junkyard could provide a boost to their technology that would bring them into the 4th or even 5th industrial revolution. It was an indispensable stepping stone!

Therefore, as long as the mission didn't seriously harm the Hope, the mission had to be completed... no matter the sacrifice, including the sacrifice of Yao Yuan's life, or even the whole 12 Homo Evolutis party!

As the second group of airships left the Hope, Yao Yuan whispered to both Zhang Heng and Chou Yue, "Zhang Heng, Chou Yue, I want both of you to train your power on this new fleet of airships as I do the same. I remember clearly that before the nebula's sun collapse, I could feel it giving off weak waves of threat. It is my speculation that the Diviner's power will not be nullified by drastic changes like a distance of 1,000 kilometers...

This is up to the three of us now!"

Zhang Heng nodded obediently, while Chou Yue remained passive. She snuck a glance at Ren Tao and saw him still spaced out. Annoyed, she turned her gaze back to the screen.

Another 20 minutes passed as the new fleet swam past floating debris to enter the junkyard... "We are approaching the location where control for the previous fleet was lost..."

Before the technician could finish his sentence, the screens that provided security feed went offline, signaling that control was once again lost. Using the long distance camera, the fleet of airships, similar to the one before it, was shown to continue deeper into the junkyard.

"The problematic spot is about eight kilometers from the junkyard's outermost perimeter!"

The scientists quickly concluded. Similarly, there was no sign of tampering in the signal routing system.

Yao Yuan turned to the Diviners. Zhang Heng shook his head immediately, while Chou Yue followed suit after a short hesitation. Yao Yuan sighed. "I too didn't feel any warnings of danger, not even an ominous feeling... It was like the airships were destined to lose control; the whole thing felt natural."

Yao Yuan stopped and kept his further thoughts to himself. After

a while, he turned to Ren Tao. "What do you think?"

Ren Tao rubbed his eyes open and said, "Release another group of airships, but this time only five per group. Is that feasible?"

Yao Yuan smiled and then nodded, "I too have the same thing in mind. Okay, send another five airships. We need to make sure whether control is lost at the same location every time, or if the 8 kilometers distance changes."

"Captain's order. Release five airships. Counting down, 10, 9, 8..."

Another 20 minutes of waiting time followed. Exhaustion appeared on the faces of many a scientist and technician, but the exhaustion was more mental than physical. The continuous cycle of relief and anxiousness, hope and despair, had taken a toll on their psyche.

Nevertheless, they held on to witness this new group of five airships lose their control at the same location eight kilometers away from the junkyard's outer perimeter.

After that, everyone in the room turned their head towards Yao Yuan, waiting for his next order. They were ready to release another group of airships, but his actual order surprised them all.

"Start the ship's engine. Move circularly around the junkyard while maintaining the 1,000 kilometers distance we have now, to a spot 300 kilometers from our current location!"

After giving his order, he turned to Ren Tao and said conspiratorially, "You must have realized too the actual spot where the airships lost control is not really eight kilometers away from its outer perimeter."

Ren Tao nodded and replied insouciantly. "Indeed, that is if my speculation is not wrong..."

"It shouldn't be," Yao Yuan affirmed. No one else could grasp what the two were saying. It was like they were conversing in their own language.

"After the Hope stops, release another set of airships. That will confirm our suspicions. And if we're right, we can proceed with the upgraded shuttle after that," Yao Yuan mumbled as he saw the angle of the footage changing. He added, "And the objective of the first shuttle flight will be to retrieve the bigger pieces floating about the outer perimeter!"

Chapter 108: Set Sail!

"Alright, let us revise our information so far," standing at the podium, Yao Yuan said through the microphone.

"We've released five sets of airships with each set having three to five airships. The first three sets lost control when they were eight kilometers into the junkyard, while the remaining two lost control at 14 kilometers. With that data, we've constructed a simulation. Could we bring that up now?" Yao Yuan requested of the technician who stood at the control panel.

The technician nodded and pushed a few buttons on the panel. After that, a 3D model appeared on screen.

"As you can see, the locations where the airships lost control have been marked with red dots. Even though all five of them are at different depths and locations, they share a striking similarity..."

Suddenly, a cluster of green dots that were larger than the reds appeared on the simulation. Waving at them, Yao Yuan continued, "Yes, that similarity is this group of spaceship pieces. Based on further surveillance, this group of spaceship pieces consists the larger ones within the junkyard, and they still contain traces of energy. The pilotless airships lose control when they are within 300 kilometers of these pieces."

Pausing for effect, Yao Yuan measured the crowd before adding, "Sadly, with our current technology, we are unable to tell what exactly caused these airships to lose control. We still need more

data and analysis before a conclusive answer can be found. Nevertheless, our next course of action is clear.

"First, upgrades will have to be done on the shuttle to replace all the auto-pilot systems with manual systems. Since it is highly likely that auto-piloted systems are the ones being tampered with by the spaceship pieces, we will have to rely on manual piloting to ensure overall safety. Only communication, life support, and anti-gravitational systems will remain automated. Speaking of which, to prevent signal interference, the old communicator fitted to the shuttle will also be upgraded to a new version. This is to ensure that constant communication is held between the shuttle and the Hope."

Yao Yuan coughed. "And that concludes the results from our airship experiment. Our preliminary scouting shows an absence of defense mechanism within the junkyard. Of course, it's still too early to let our guard down. After all, the airships had barely entered the junkyard when control was lost. There might be traps further in. In any case, we will find out more when the shuttle sets sail at 10 AM tomorrow. Dismissed."

With that, the meeting for the first scouting operation was concluded. The result wasn't particularly heartening, nor was it worrying. As Yao Yuan said, more would be revealed with the departure of the shuttle the day after.

That night, everyone who was involved was plagued by a miasma of apprehension.

The next morning at around 10 AM, the attendants of the first

flights, Yao Yuan, Zhang Heng, and Ying stepped into the upgraded shuttle. Under the Hope's watchful eyes, they left for the spaceship junkyard.

All three men wore the new aerospace combat suit prototype 1. The difference was immediately noticeable. The suits applied significantly less pressure on the wearer, making their footsteps lighter.

Since they were deprived of auto-pilot, Yao Yuan was manually piloting the shuttle towards the junkyard. With his hands on the control panel, he turned to both Zhang Heng and Ying. "Repeat to me our mission."

Zhang Heng replied instantly, "My main mission is to keep my power open to sense any kind of impending danger. If there is one, I will inform you immediately. Instead of cardinal direction, I will use clock position to relay the information. And if the danger is over or below us, I will say top or bottom."

Yao Yuan nodded in agreement. The choice of clock position was the result of their discussion from the day before. Since it was not an easy feat determining the cardinal directions in space, they had decided upon using clock position to make the transfer of information faster. The difference of one or two seconds in space could make all the difference. Secondly, the accuracy of the angle was also clearer using clock position direction than cardinal directions. After all, the face of a clock has smaller increments than the face of a compass.

In a way, the shuttle was the center of their compass. Yao Yuan

and Zhang Heng's directional system was set up with the forward direction of the shuttle as 12 o' clock. For example, 12 to 6 o' clock would be on their right, while 6 to 12 o' clock would be on their left. Vertically, everything above the shuttle would be their top and everything beneath will be known as bottom.

Of course, this system was not without its flaw. Even though it was more precise than cardinal direction, it was still not accurate enough. However, until they were given a better compass, this was the best they had.

Ying spoke next. "My mission is to closely examine the metal pieces around the shuttle using my power when we've arrived at the junkyard. I am to look for valuable items like weaponry, machines, and robotic parts like computer chips."

Yao Yuan nodded his approval. He added, "Using both Perceptor and Seeker powers, it is my responsibility to pilot this shuttle. Combined with the Diviner's power, I will make sure we get to the junkyard and back in one piece. The triumvirate of superhuman abilities will also help me evade all possible dangers in the shortest time possible."

After the trio went through their respective missions, a voice came through the communicator, "Captain, you are now 700 kilometers away from the junkyard. You will reach your destination in about 1 minute and 42 seconds. The experts suggest you slow down the shuttle's speed to prevent direct collision with stray pieces."

"Okay, slowing down. 7 kilometers per second... 6.5 kilometers

per second... 6 kilometers per second..."

With the push of a button, a liquid hydrogen and oxygen fire pulsed from the front of the shuttle, slowing it down. When they were at 50 kilometers from the junkyard, their speed was at around 300 meters per second. They were still slowing down as the shuttle inched closer to their destination.

Finally, the shuttle was primed to enter the junkyard. At that moment, not only were the three on the shuttle holding their breaths, everyone on the Hope held a collective breath. They beat with one heart. After all, this wasn't a pilotless airship anymore; there was lots to lose.

The shuttle was piloted by their captain and also the Hope's only All-Rounder. His passengers were no less important. Zhang Heng, the Hope's best Diviner, and Ying, one of the few Seekers.

Any loss would be a huge loss!

"Entering the junkyard in 10 seconds, please make all necessary preparations!" the voice on the communicator said. The shuttle was charged with an air of anticipation.

"Zhang Heng!" Yao Yuan said, in a low voice.

Zhang Heng hesitated for two seconds before saying, "No signs of danger!"

"Ying!" Yao Yuan said.

Without any hesitation, Ying replied as he stared firmly ahead, "I'm already in seeker state... so far nothing worthwhile yet!"

"Okay... Let's enter the junkyard!"

With a pull of the lever, the shuttle lurched into the junkyard. After pushing away some of the floating debris, they were officially in the junkyard!

"Hope, initiate an overall check on the shuttle's functionalities!" Yao Yuan shouted into the communicator.

"...The shuttle is functioning fine. Communication signal stable, nothing wrong!"

"Alright, keep a close eye on the shuttle's situation. We are moving five kilometers deeper into the junkyard. Issue an alert if we get too close to any bigger pieces."

Activating all his powers, Yao Yuan led the shuttle carefully and slowly forward in a bubble of silence.

After another five kilometers into the junkyard, the debris floating around them had significantly increased. They even started to spot the bigger pieces among them. However, Zhang Heng still received no sign of danger and Ying too hadn't found anything useful.

"Attention, members of the shuttle, you are getting closer to a piece of energy-laden spaceship part. Please be careful, you are currently 308 kilometers from it. You have seven more kilometers before entering its danger zone!"

Yao Yuan nodded. "Understood, please keep us apprised of the situation!" Nevertheless, they kept moving forward.

Slowly but surely, the shuttle kept gliding closer to the large spaceship part to a point where Guang Zhen shouted through the communicator asking them to return.

Yao Yuan looked at their progress chart and it showed that they had ventured 11 kilometers into the junkyard. He persuaded himself to go back since this was only their first flight, so there was no need to take such enormous risk.

"Okay, the shuttle is preparing to return..." Yao Yuan answered as he moved to turn the shuttle around. He was going to use the shuttle's perimeter engines to propel the shuttle around. After the shuttle turned about 10 degrees, Ying suddenly frowned.

"Wait! Yao Yuan, I saw something!"

Yao Yuan quickly directed the shuttle's light beam to where Ying was pointing. The glint of a small, transparent object was picked up by the light!

Yao Yuan could feel his heart skip a beat. He had no idea what the thing was, but since it was so distinctively different from the metallic debris around it, it had to be useful. He yelled into the communicator, "Hope, I need a reading on the shuttle's distance to the big spaceship part!"

"...The shuttle is currently 11 kilometers into the junkyard and two kilometers away from a sizeable spaceship part."

"Thank you." Yao Yuan turned to the other two in the shuttle. "The spot of reflection is not within the 300 kilometers radius from any spaceship part, so I've decided that we will go for it! Zhang Heng, keep your power open, and Ying, keep an eye on our surroundings and other possible objects of interest."

"We are going to get ourselves our first alien-made product!"

Chapter 109: Music Box

The retrieval of the alien object was successful. There was no accident.

Nevertheless, the object was handled with extreme care.

First, the extra metallic debris that was stuck to the object was peeled off and set off to the side. Then, a layer of plastic cover was wrapped around the object to prevent it from being exposed to outside air since there was no telling what reaction it might have with airborne microbes and viruses.

After that, it was deposited into a small, glass chest which was then tightly sealed. Lastly, it was taken into the shuttle and secured among the shelves. Care was taken to ensure it wouldn't fall off the edge or knock into other stuff.

"Collect the peeled metallic pieces using the mechanical arms and then we'll return to the Hope," Yao Yuan ordered, in a low and weak voice. Keeping multiple superhuman abilities open had put an insurmountable amount of pressure on Yao Yuan's well-being, but he still tried his best to focus as he steered the shuttle back to the Hope.

Heavy with everyone's prayers, the trio on the shuttle returned safely to the Hope. Even before the shuttle door opened, they could see that a spacesuit-wearing crowd had gathered around the hangar awaiting their return.

As the trio stepped gingerly off the cabin, the crowd separated into 2. The larger party rushed instantly into the shuttle to box and transport the collected metallic planks, while a small run-off of the larger group went to secure the glass chest. So much attention and care was given to the chest that one would think they were handling a newborn baby.

On the other hand, without removing their spacesuits, Yao Yuan, Zhang Heng, and Ying followed the smaller of the two parties to a miniature, vacuum isolation chamber. After that, they had to walk through a microbial disinfectant bath. Only then could they remove their spacesuits.

"Good God, this is annoying! Do we have to do this every time we return from space?" grumbled a tired Zhang Heng.

Yao Yuan nodded lightly. "Yes, it is troublesome, but unfortunately necessary. These steps have to be taken until the Academy comes up with a powerful antibiotic... but I don't think we will live to see that happen."

Ying stood beside Yao Yuan without a word. As Yao Yuan finished, he took advantage of the break in conversation to add, "If there's nothing more, I shall go take my rest."

Yao Yuan nodded at Ying before turning to Zhang Heng. "You should go rest as well. Even though the pressure from using a passive skill is less demanding than an active one, I'm sure you're tired as well. Go take a good rest, because things are going to get hectic for the next few days."

Zhang Heng yawned as Ying took his wordless retreat. "Okay then, Captain. Now that you've mentioned it, I do feel drained. Weird, it doesn't feel that way when you're actively using the power." Zhang Heng bade Yao Yuan goodbye before turning to follow Ying.

Yao Yuan was left behind with the group of people that they had followed. To be frank, Yao Yuan wished to trade places with Zhang Heng or Ying because he was definitely more tired than either of them. However, since he was not only the leader of this expedition but also of this ship, he didn't have that luxury.

"How's the surveillance on the junkyard?" Yao Yuan asked as someone handed him a folder.

That someone was Barbie. Dressed to the nines in a revealing, lace dress, she replied professionally, "The 24 hour surveillance on the junkyard didn't reveal any development worth noting. And this here is a proposal written by a group of scientists."

"Huh, a report by Bo Li?" Yao Yuan asked no one in particular when he saw the name on the cover. Then he started to read in earnest.

The more he read, the deeper his frown. According to the proposal, the Hope was way too close to the junkyard. It was only 1,000 kilometers away from the junkyard's outer perimeter, and more worryingly, only 1,000 and several hundred kilometers away from the bigger spaceship pieces within it. The Gaussian weaponry

invented by Bo Li's team could easily penetrate the Hope's walls at this distance, so one could imagine the damage that could be wrought if they were assaulted by laser or plasma weaponry.

The safest distance provided in the proposal was... more than 10,000 kilometers away.

Even though Gaussian bullets would only take 10 seconds to traverse a distance of 10,000 kilometers, the great distance would drop its accuracy to almost 0. Granted the Hope's massive body wouldn't be able to evade the bullets easily, that wouldn't matter when the bullets couldn't even connect in the first place.

The proposal elaborated that high precision triangulation was needed for long-distance combat in space, and unless this ruined civilization had access to advanced technology like a photon computer, they would be safe a distance away. Furthermore, even if they had a photon computer, it would have been ruined or pillaged in the midst of its downfall. The proposal decided on a 10,000 kilometers distance on the grounds that a homing system on stray missiles wouldn't be efficient enough to strike its target accurately that far away.

"10,000 kilometers, is it?" echoed Yao Yuan as he mulled over the findings of the proposal.

The upgraded shuttle could travel at a maximum speed of 10 kilometers per second in zero-gravity. It would take about 15 minutes to cross 10,000 kilometers, but taking into account acceleration and deceleration, that would increase to about 20 minutes.

"Alright, I'll approve of this proposal. Send this to the engine room, tell them to move the Hope 10,000 kilometers away from the junkyard. Is there anything else?" Yao Yuan queried.

Barbie shook her head before adding, "There is nothing else at the moment, but I do need to remind Captain that you have a meeting scheduled at 3 PM. It will be about the external cabin."

"OK, noted," Yao Yuan said as he glanced at his watch. Nodding, he added, "Then I shall take a rest before then. Please wake me up at about 2.30 PM. However if there's any update on the junkyard, the metallic planks, and the small alien object, do wake me up immediately."

"Okay," Barbie replied as she wrote into her datebook. Finished, she looked up and smiled. "Then I shall wish you a good rest, captain. Sweet dreams."

Yao Yuan chuckled lightly. He then lugged his tired body to one of the nearby electromobiles to get back to his chamber. He started snoring the moment his body hit the bed.

At the same time, a series of biochemical tests were being done on the spaceship's metallic planks and the small, mysterious object. This testing, which was overseen by Mitsuvara Saburo, was carried out to ensure that these alien objects didn't contain harmful microbes. The result was negative, but nevertheless, to be safe, Saburo decided to conduct a life experiment using a ZH lab rat.

The rat showed no visible difference to its activity after 1 hour of close enclosure with pieces of the spaceship metals. The pathologist finally concluded that there was no harmful microbe on the two alien objects.

"... Isn't this to be expected? These two things have survived in space for god knows how many years. Even if there were microbes in the beginning, they would have been long dead by now after such a long exposure to a lack of light and air," whispered one of the interns, taking a jab at the pathologists' extra cautiousness.

To his shock and consternation, a pathologist heard him. Without raising a fuss, the pathologist merely whispered back, "And how do you know what form these alien microbes would take? The fact that the cosmos could create life is already in itself an enigmatic miracle. None of us know where the limit of evolution lies. Even the smallest crack on Earth could contain never-before-seen organisms, much less in space. Maybe there is a type of organism that could survive solely on solar radiation. We can't afford to be too careful, young man. The lives of 10,000 plus people and not to mention the whole human civilization depends on us. We must be as thorough as we can be."

The young intern nodded obediently in silent shame. After the pathologist walked away, his mouth turned up in derision, but he wisely kept his thoughts to himself as he sauntered over to the experiment tables.

"We've confirmed that there is no harmful microbe or bacteria on the alien objects. The life experiment confirms this

observation," Saburo announced to the rest of the group.

The group was made up of scientists from diverse fields, ranging from psychics, kinetics, and energy to biometrics. They greeted Saburo's news with applause. Suddenly, a sing-songy melody cut through the thunderous claps.

Everyone froze to follow the melody. Their eyes finally fell upon a glinting, metallic sphere. The sphere was the size of a child's balled up fist. It was lying in the middle of its shed shell and it was the source of the melody.

And a soft, melodious tune, not unlike a child's humming, filled the lab...

Chapter 110: A Child's Last Words

Yao Yuan awoke to Barbie's voice. He looked at his watch and it showed 2.30 pm. After a simple bathroom ritual, he left for a 4th floor conference room to join the discussion on the Hope's external cabin.

After several months of construction, the first external cabin was finally ready. Its size was 1/10 of the Hope's 6th floor biomes. The space would be perfect for a cattle farm, which could increase the Hope's daily milk production by 2 to 3 times.

However, due to the wide range of products processed by the Hope, its Department of Agriculture had birthed many sub-committees. There were committees for vegetable products, wheat products, meat products, animal by-products, and luxury products like coffee, cocoa, as well as tobacco, and every single one of them was vying for this valuable space.

The discussion was thus sidetracked by intra-departmental politics and sarcastic barbs. This was Yao Yuan's first taste of western policy-making, where each committee had their own say to the matter. For example, representatives from the staple food committee proclaimed that the Hope's food storage was still below the safety line, so they would face food shortage if there was calamity.

The committee for luxury products, on the other hand, invited an economist to give a speech on the negative impacts a decrease in luxury products would have on the Hope's overall economy... The discussion dragged on with each committee plying for the spot

until Yao Yuan dictatorially decided to use the external cabin to farm animal by-products like milk and eggs. Yao Yuan sighed inwardly, knowing that chaos was going to repeat when the next cabin was ready.

The discussion concluded at around 4.30 PM. As Yao Yuan exited the room, he murmured, "Goodness, Barbie, don't you westerners have a sense of organizational discipline? But... then again, I've witnessed the presence of such discipline working as a company headhunter."

Barbie covered her mouth and giggled. "The difference between the two is obvious. There is oftentimes no worker protection when you work for a company. The higher-ups could willy-nilly let a general worker or even a manager go. One could complain, but that would normally be to no avail. The best you can do is accept the severance deal and quickly look for your next meal ticket.

"A governmental posting is wildly different. A president can't just let his or her cabinet ministers go without proper justification. This is especially true for a democratic society because the public backlash would be devastating. The president would have little chance of getting re-elected."

Barbie stopped and turned to look at the animal by-products committee members who were just leaving. They had smiles all over their faces. After they were a distance away, Barbie continued, "For some reason, when you first drafted the government officers, you purposely avoided putting Chinese officials at leadership posts. Many of them had the relevant experience, but you didn't even give them a committee leader post.

Therefore, most of the leaders in the agriculture department are westerners. Furthermore, they are familiar with your temperament, so it's only natural that everyone gave it their all to stake a claim for their own group."

"My temperament? And what would that be?" Yao Yuan asked curiously.

"You are what we call a 'fake dictator,' and that's a compliment." Barbie giggled. "Even though you've proclaimed a dictatorial governing style, there have been policies like the creation of House of Representatives and policies that strive for cultural assimilation. Furthermore, other than important positions, like department leaders, all the other government postings require intra-departmental recommendations, and those are decidedly democratic. All of this combined makes you a 'fake dictator.'"

Yao Yuan rubbed his nose self-consciously, but he didn't directly rebut Barbie. Instead, he said, "That's because I have not shown my dictator side yet. Furthermore, the word 'dictator' has many nuances in its meaning... Actually, never mind that. Plus, aren't you going to ask why I purposely put those Chinese officers at the lowest level? The reasoning's mighty complicated, but here, I'll try to explain it with a joke.

"Once upon a time, an infamous drug lord was captured by Interpol. He was temporarily detained after his trial at the international court while he awaited his transport to his country of origin. In that period, he befriended his fellow cellmate, who was a turncoat emissary. During one of their conversations, the drug lord asked, 'Right, we've been talking for so long, but I still don't

know why are you in here, and what country did you work for again?’

"After a long and pregnant silence, the emissary replied, ‘I’m a Chinese government officer...’

"The drug lord paused and then nodded in commiseration, ‘Okay, I get it...’"

Barbie turned to Yao Yuan with a confused face. She frowned, waiting for the punch-line before finally conceding. "Wait, that’s it? Unlike the drug lord, I don’t think I get it."

Yao Yuan laughed heartily in response. "No matter, it’s okay if you don’t get it." He massaged his temples and continued, "If there’s nothing else, I will have a simple dinner and resume my sleep. The analysis on the alien object should be ready by tomorrow morning, right?"

Barbie replied, "Then, Captain, I’m afraid you might have to miss your sleep tonight. The preliminary result on the object is back... and it said that the scientists have identified the object’s purpose... or rather, the object has revealed its own purpose..."

"Pat, pat, pat."

Yao Yuan clapped his hands wordlessly. Just like what the scientists reported, the metallic sphere that sat on the table cracked open on its own to release a soft melody. An indistinctive

voice could be heard intermingled within the melody, but it didn't appear to be human-sounding. It was too sing-songy for normal conversation; it sounded more like someone or something was singing a Broadway musical.

"This is it? The thing that we've risked our lives for is a damn music box?" Yao Yuan turned around with a stern expression, questioning the scientists in the room with his finger still pointing at the music box.

The scientists too held frustrated expressions. They were also hoping for something valuable or practical, like computer hard disc, weaponry, engines, or surveillance probes. The fact that they had ended up with a mere music box didn't sit well with them either.

However, one of the scientists replied instantly, "Captain, please continue listening. This is not just a music box. It is a recorder as well. At around 27 minutes, when the music stops for shuffle, you can hear some alien speech."

Reining in his annoyance, Yao Yuan pulled over a chair and sat down to listen.

Slowly, he started to appreciate the soft-flowing melody. It gave him a sense of freedom, freedom of floating carefree through endless space. However, the freedom also hid an undercurrent of sadness, especially when paired with the vocals of the female singer. Even though the vocals were begrudgingly high-pitched, like it came from the undeveloped voice box of a child, Yao Yuan had to admit that the singer had a soothing and graceful voice.

When the last tune ended, the sounds of clapping could be heard from the music box. It was then followed by a male sing-songy voice. In comparison, the vocal range of this second voice was much greater than the first one. Under normal circumstances, Yao Yuan would come to the conclusion that the male was a veteran Broadway star while the female was a young talent.

"More singing?" Yao Yuan asked, with more than a hint of annoyance.

However, what he heard next overturned that suspicion. After the male voice fell off, the female, childlike voice replied in a similar sing-songy manner. It sounded like they were singing to one another without musical accompaniment. However, the giggles and breaks in the female voice that sounded suspiciously like a child asking for praise proved that the recording was mostly likely a conversation between a grown alien male and a young alien female.

The conversation continued for quite some time until it ended with two resounding claps.

Yao Yuan stood up and said, "An alien language... Sadly, we can't translate it, or else I'm sure we could extract valuable information, like their societal structure, from the conversation..."

The scientist laughed bitterly to himself. "Lieutenant Colonel, there's still some more..."

"Huh, there's more?"

Yao Yuan sat back down to continue listening. The recording on the music box was interspersed with clapping sounds, and following the claps would either be the alien female singing or she would be talking to herself. The male alien had a much stingier appearance. Just like that, Yao Yuan sat patiently listening for one and a half hours. Just before he lost his patience, another clap happened, but this time, it was followed by the sound of a small explosion.

That shocked Yao Yuan out of his reverie, and he started to pay close attention to what followed next.

After the explosion, the sound of the female alien came back on, but this time she sounded like she was crying. She was saying something haltingly, but it was muffled by her crying and the unfamiliarity of the alien language. The sounds of the explosion got increasingly louder as it got closer, and the same was with the girl's crying. Nevertheless, she was repeating the same syllables like a broken record.

Finally, the girl shouted the syllables before it was drowned out by an ear-splitting explosion. The sphere instantly shrunk back to its original form, a fist-sized ball, signaling that it had finished playing the recording.

Yao Yuan sighed deeply. He asked hesitantly, "That last recording... that's a sound bite from when the spaceship fleet was destroyed, right?"

The scientist beside him nodded reluctantly, then he added, "By comparing and contrasting every part of the recording, we managed to figure out the meaning of the syllables. She said that every time the male voice appeared, so that leads us to believe that the few syllables she kept repeating until the end was...

"Father, or more accurately... daddy."

Chapter 111: Technological Levels

The sound of the music box was replaced by a heavy silence. The people recorded might've been from another species, but the fear inherent in a child's keening for her parent was something that was instinctual. The child's mewling understandably pulled a few heartstrings.

10 seconds later, Yao Yuan said firmly, "Alright, let's all first collect our feelings. I know what we've heard is difficult to stomach, but we need to understand that this might have happened thousands of years ago... It shouldn't weigh us down. If anything, we should be that much more wary if we don't want the devastation that happened in the recording to happen to us."

Yao Yuan continued, in a measured voice, "Continue analyzing this music box. I want to know everything there is to know about this music box. There is no detail that is too small."

Before Yao Yuan could finish, a scientist stepped forth. "Captain, it is my belief that this music box is no less valuable than say a weapon blueprint or a computer chip. Of course, we need more analysis to be precise, but for starters, this music box has an incredibly powerful battery.

"As you've said, this music box might be from thousands of years ago, but as we've seen for ourselves, it's still fully functional. The only plausible rationale is that it is supported by a powerful battery, and the battery itself must be small, because the whole music box is only so big. With that theory in mind, one can't help but draw a parallel to the lights emanating from the spaceship

carcasses. Why do you think the lights on the spaceship pieces are still functional?"

Yao Yuan turned back to the music box and concluded, "Yes, a small power system that could store an impressive amount of energy for an extended period of time. That would be a valuable technology for us to learn... What else?"

With fear of being overshadowed, another scientist came forth and uttered excitedly, "Captain, there is also a small software program that we could study. Even though we already have a certain degree of mastery over sound-operated technology, there are still ways to go until we reach perfection. For example, we can turn lights on and off using our voices, but that is limited by volume and accents. Furthermore, because this function is directed by a written software program, the intended device has to be connected to a computer."

Pointing at the music box, he continued, "Our analysis showed that the sound trigger for this music box is not influenced by conventional nuances like volume. It also responds to recorded clapping sounds. Such high sensitivity could only be explained by the presence of a highly effective sound recognition program. In other words, there exists a computer within this fist-sized object, one that is as powerful as our common home PC!"

Yao Yuan started to view the music box in a new light. He was surprised to realize that this unassuming object of a child's fist-size could harbor so many valuable technological marvels. He couldn't help but feel delighted at the discovery.

"The technology for this civilization is, as expected, far more advanced than ours, but..." Yao Yuan hesitated before adding, "These are imaginable technologies... They're not science fiction-esque technologies like the ones on U..." he caught himself and coughed, "Like the ones we have on the Hope, like the space-warping and anti-gravitational technologies."

Yao Yuan almost blurted out the word 'UFO,' but thankfully he was quick to realize his mistake, because most of the people in the room had no inkling of its existence.

A girl among the scientists caught Yao Yuan's verbal faux pas, and that girl was Bo Li. She narrowed her eyes at Yao Yuan as if admonishing him for almost accidentally spilling top secret information. Cornered into an uncomfortable position, Yao Yuan hacked out a few dry coughs.

In an attempt to divert attention, Bo Li said, "Further analysis could be done on this music box's structural construction, raw materials, and even internal circuits. This reminds me. The metallic planks that Captain brought back were identified as a type of feather-weight alloy. Its light weight aside, it also has a tensile strength and melting point that is greater than all known metals. We've only managed to melt a tiny section of it by using plasma rays. We've learned of its empirical formula, but we still can't manufacture this alloy because its atomic arrangement is one that we're not familiar with."

Recovered from his previous faux pas, Yao Yuan continued after some serious consideration. "Then could anyone ballpark for me how far ahead is this civilization's technology from ours? We don't

need to go into something as detailed as how many years because too many factors could play into that, so describe it instead in terms of revolution. This civilization would represent which of our industrial revolutions?"

"The fourth!"

"The end of the fourth revolution!"

"The middle of the fourth..."

"The early fifth..."

There were multiple answers, but they fell within the general duration from the late middle of the fourth industrial revolution to the cusp of the fifth.

Yao Yuan had studied plenty of scientific treatises ever since he got on the Hope, but he was ultimately not a trained scientist, so he asked, "Why are all of you so sure? Is there a huge difference between the end of the fourth revolution to the start of the fifth that there needs a distinction? Also, could such a huge fleet of warships really be created during the fourth revolution?"

The leading scientist, Silewei, stepped forth to answer. "Captain, to understand all that, you first have to fix a misconception, one about industrial revolution... First, did you know that the advancement from the 20th century to the early 21st century is several hundred times greater than the total scientific

advancement for the whole history of humanity? And the scientific progress achieved in the 10 years after the start of the 3rd revolution was about 100 times greater than the progress accumulated by man throughout both the first and second industrial revolutions?

"Industrial or scientific revolutions are scientific progress calculated in exponential and not incremental increase. For example, if the first revolution is represented by the multiplier of 1, the second revolution would not be 2, instead it could 20 or even 200, and when it reaches the third revolution, the multiplier could be in the thousands or millions!"

Silewei continued firmly, "Traditionally speaking, we can only predict what will happen in the next revolution. It is impossible to predict the one after that. Take the first revolution for an example, people in the 18th and 19th century couldn't possibly imagine what things would look like in the third revolution. Important events like the moon landing, personal computers, and genetic engineering were for them stuff of science fiction. In contrast, they managed to predict the promises our second revolution would usher in, most notably being the discovery of electricity. This proves once more that my theory that man could only correctly predict the discoveries in the approaching scientific revolution but not the ones after that."

Silewei stopped before pointing straight at the music box. "Captain, it is undeniable that this music box has opened a door for us. Instead of technologies like space-warping and anti-gravitational systems that we couldn't wrap our heads around, this music box provides us with familiar but decidedly far more advanced technologies in fields of electrical systems,

manufacturing, and computer science. This is definite proof that this alien civilization, with this music box as an example of its scientific product, is at the end of our fourth industrial revolution!"

Yao Yuan sighed in relief. "That's definitely good to know... I'll be frank, I've been afraid the technology from this civilization would be far too advanced for us to study. Just like how it was with the space-warping technology, we couldn't make headway into understanding it even though it is technically in our possession. That would also seriously deter our exploratory plans because its defensive system would probably be powerful enough to annihilate us with just one hit.

So thank you for relieving me of my worries. This also confirms my suspicion that we will enter the fourth revolution after we acquire more of this civilization's technologies. That will prove invaluable to our overall survival in space. Knowing this, I'm also less worried about sending our men into the junkyard."

Pausing for thought, Yao Yuan breathed in and out several times before stressing adamantly, "The mission to scour the outer perimeter of the junkyard will resume tomorrow. Please do not stop with your analyses and experiments, because after we've acquired several more pieces of the alien product to ascertain its technological level...

"We shall venture into one of the warship husks!"

Chapter 112: Operation Leap!

The Hope had been idling for one and a half months 10,000 kilometers away from the junkyard.

Nevertheless, it is not to say that nothing had been done, because internal development had been going on 24/7.

This could be credited to the citizens' impeccable time management habits. Their hectic lifestyles from way back when was now properly emulated on the Hope. This was because things were going well on the Hope.

With the advent of currency came a burgeoning economy. There were also social safety nets provided by the government. Even if one refused to work, he or she would still be allotted a small residence and enough food supply to pass the day. There was no sight of any homeless people or beggars on the Hope.

However, the situation was still not perfect. For example, their food choices were extremely limited. Other than the staple grains and canned food, fresh vegetables were available only once every few days, while fresh meats even less. The rarest were, of course, luxury items like sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, cigarettes, alcohol, and seafood.

After the initial wave of anxiety regarding both their survival in space and an unknown government had passed, the Hope finally started rebuilding its societal structure. They had, after all, spent at least one whole year in space. The initial consternation had

slowly worn off. The most obvious of this evolution was the flourishing of the new entertainment industry.

Basic entertainment amenities, like internet cafés and karaoke, were original features on the Hope. They were designed into the spaceship when the Hope was still the Noah 2. Other than that, to preserve its passengers' mental health, Earth's government had added features like three basketball courts, one soccer court, cinemas, and many others into the spaceship's blueprint. In the beginning, many of these had remained unused because the Hope's government had much greater things, like escaping certain death, to worry about. One year later, the tension on the Hope had relaxed enough to have some of these places reopen.

Today, every Saturday and Sunday were designated as official off days. There was double-pay for workers working on off days and triple pay for those willing to work on official holidays. In other words, it was not hard for the citizens of the Hope to earn sizeable H-coin savings. With this came the requests to open more entertainment amenities.

This public request was brought to the House of Representatives and it was passed with an 87 percent approval rating. 11 percent voted negative while 2 percent voided their votes.

This had much to do with the fact that the majority of the Hope's citizens were in the age group of 20s and 30s. Their mindset was that of your typical city-dwellers, and what big city doesn't have a vibrant nightlife and entertainment scene?

Faced with this challenge, Yao Yuan decided to adopt the

delegation approach. This was because he was unfamiliar with economics and politics. Like how he handed every science-related issue to the Academy, with this particular endeavor, he relied heavily on advice from political and economic advisors.

This approach had proved fruitful for Yao Yuan thus far. With the bountiful harvest from the asteroid, progress on the Hope was growing fast. Developments could be found in departments of manufacturing, medicine, and electroplating. The House of Representatives was even discussing the possibility of streamlining the Hope's education system.

Riding this wave of progression was the successful construction of the external cabin. This external cabin could be taken into the Hope whenever the spaceship had to space-warp or was too close to a high gravity intergalactic entity. It could be brought out to air during other more peaceful times.

Needless to say, modifications also needed to be done on the Hope's outer shell to accommodate this new external cabin. Other than that, the walls on both the cabin and the Hope had to be cut and rewelded, and the life support system and anti-gravitational units had to be rewired and redirected.

It was Yao Yuan's assumption that all these would take at least another 6 more months to complete, but he had underestimated the public's feverish tempo. Both upgrades were finished in under 2 months! The news was so unbelievable that Yao Yuan had to suspect the engineering crew for cutting corners to rush the projects. Results from the quality control unit had proven Yao Yuan wrong. In fact, according to their report, the quality of the

external cabin might even be greater than that of the Hope itself.

In any case, Yao Yuan was glad that he was proven wrong, because it meant that within this next week, they could add more farms and plantations.

Within this one and a half months, progress was not limited to things inside the Hope because surveillance and scouting on the junkyard hadn't stopped. So far, the shuttle had taken 30 trips into the junkyard, retrieving about 80 metallic planks and sheets of various metallic compositions. They had also retrieved 6 alien products, but they were all small items like music boxes, timers and some other unknown objects. The most valuable among them was a fairly complete lighting device.

Yao Yuan knew they had exhausted almost all of the possibilities the junkyard's outer perimeter could provide. True findings could only be found by venturing deeper into the junkyard!

"...Like what I mentioned before, I don't think there is much left to be gained from going around the junkyard's outer perimeter. It's time for us to go deeper into the junkyard!"

Yao Yuan declared, while standing at the war room's podium. Behind him was a rough map sketch of the junkyard. A 2D map couldn't effectively represent the enormity of the junkyard, but since they didn't know much about the junkyard's inner world anyway, it would have to do for now.

"The team of 12 will depart tomorrow. Our destination will be a 7

kilometers long, 600 meters wide, and 200 meters tall warship husk 20 kilometers into the junkyard. It is the smallest one closest to the outer perimeter."

Yao Yuan stopped and scanned the 11 people gathered below the stage. "The time of departure is 9 AM tomorrow. Prepare the necessary equipment before then. They are 1 aerospace combat suit prototype 1, 1 wolf-eye flashlight, 1 combat rifle, and 1 Gaussian Gun prototype 1. Beyond that, Wa Luo will need to take some space-use explosives, Ebon space-use machine gun, Ying anti-material sniper rifle. and Xiao Yan multi-frequency communicator."

Liu Bai raised his hand. "What about me? Do I need to carry along some medical kits?"

Yao Yuan shook his head. "That will not be necessary. Because of the unique space environment, you won't be able to provide treatment without taking off the spacesuit anyway... right, a reminder. Behind the combat suit's shoulders, heels, and waist, there are mini rocket propellers. Their functionality can persist for 5 whole minutes and they are ocular activated. There is a scanner on the top end of your space helmet. If you stare at the spot for more than 5 seconds, it will light up red. Keep staring at it for another 5 seconds and the propellers will be activated.

"Similarly, the direction of the propellers will be determined by your eyes. After the propellers are activated, they will push you towards the direction you're looking at. The propellers can't be halted midway, so please reserve them for emergency use only. The speed they provide isn't fast enough to prompt any serious

worry, but please don't underestimate the power of inertia in space."

Yao Yuan stopped once more and his expression dimmed. He continued, "I cannot stress enough the importance of these propellers. Because the warship husk is a complete unknown, there is no guarantee the shuttle will not lose control like how the airships did. This propeller system may be our last hope for getting back to the Hope!

"For tomorrow's mission, I will request the Hope to open and train all its spotlights at our target destination. Yes, the junkyard is 10,000 kilometers away, but even so, we should still be able to see where the Hope is. So, God forbid, if we are stranded in space, please follow the lights closely! Propel yourself towards the lights because that represents our hope!

"Dismissed!

"Be at the gathering point by 9 AM tomorrow!

"We will start the mission at 9 on the dot and it will be officially called Operation Leap!"

Chapter 113: Blank Space

All 12 members of the unit dealt with the incoming mission in their own unique ways. Ying and Ebon were happily preparing their guns and ammos, pumped for a new mission; Zhang Heng was worried sick, barely managing a bite of his dinner; Chou Yue spent the whole night talking with Ren Tao; Yao Yuan threw himself into administrative work until 10 PM and had a dreamless sleep until 8:30 AM the next morning.

Before 9 AM, all 12 of them gathered at the shuttle hangar, the location where their equipment and spacesuits stood at the ready. As the clock struck 9, they would collectively walk into the shuttle to begin Operation Leap.

"Do you feel any danger now?" Ren Tao suddenly whispered to Chou Yue.

Chou Yue fired back sullenly. "What? You refused to talk to me yesterday night but now suddenly you're willing to do so?"

Ren Tao smiled brightly. "That's because we're boarding. Now is the time you should be able to tell whether there is any danger."

Chou Yue was adamant to not give Ren Tao any time of her day, but in the end, she ceded. "There's nothing now, but why didn't you approach Zhang Heng with the question? I'm just a half-baked Diviner, so there's no point in asking me!"

Ren Tao stopped to seriously consider her question before finally

admitting, "That's because you're closer to me, so it's much more convenient."

"You idiot!"

At the same time, Yao Yuan incidentally was asking Zhang Heng that very question, a question to which Zhang Heng firmly replied, "No, there's no sign of danger."

"Great, everyone, please put on your spacesuits and get ready. We will enter the shuttle and start the mission at 8:55!"

Under Yao Yuan's command, everyone started to get into their spacesuits. With the attending officials helping, the prep-work was quickly done. After Yao Yuan led everyone into the shuttle, everyone ventured to their assigned station, waiting for the countdown to start.

As the countdown dropped to 0, the shuttle accelerated on the rails before gliding out of the Hope. With Yao Yuan at the helm, they sped towards their destination at maximum speed. None spoke during the journey, Ying and Ebon calmly went over their load, Zhang Heng and Chou Yue sat to a side quietly while Ren Tao was his usual spaced-out self... 10 minutes later, the shuttle decelerated as it inched closer to the junkyard's outer perimeter. They were at a speed of several hundred meters per second but were still decelerating.

"Alright, we're officially in the junkyard area. The shuttle can't move fast beyond this point because there are too many floating

pieces around us. We will reach the point where the airships lost control in another 20 kilometers. Zhang Heng and Chou Yue, tell me the instant you feel danger," Yao Yuan announced, while keeping his eyes on the navigation.

The duo nodded in reply. As the shuttle crawled to the break-off point, the sense of worry in the shuttle started to mount. Even Yao Yuan, who had been in plenty of battlefields and life-or-death situations, started having clammy hands.

And then the lights in the shuttle started flickering before going off completely. Other than the headlights fitted into the spacesuit, it was a world of darkness inside the shuttle.

Not only that, even the lights from the control panel had disappeared. In that moment, it felt like all 12 of them had been dropped into space, because it was as empty and dark inside as it was outside!

"Zhang Heng! Chou Yue! Do you feel any danger?" Yao Yuan yelled hurriedly as he tried to bring the shuttle back under control.

He waited for several seconds, but there was still no reply. A chill grabbed his heart, fearing that the two of them were dead. He turned back in a hurry and was relieved to see 11 weak globs of light in the dark. He looked closer and spotted Zhang Heng and Chou Yue's faces, and their mouths were moving rapidly as if in speech.

"What's happening? Is it because you've felt danger? Why aren't

you speaking?" Yao Yuan turned back to the control panel in a hurry, but he still heard no forthcoming reply.

(... Of course! The internal communicator must have lost its power!) The reality of the situation finally dawned on Yao Yuan and he breathed a sigh of relief.

In preparation for moments like these, other than the modification done on the shuttle, extra efforts had been made to improve the spacesuits' autonomy. Naturally, there had been updates to help it defend against signal interference, but beyond that, the autonomy of the spacesuit had also been increased in the sense that it would remain operational for as long as 12 hours from the moment the main electrical supply was lost. [This was thanks to an isolated battery that was added to the combat suit prototypes.](#)

If they had to rely completely on external power supply to maintain the spacesuits' life support, it was certain they would die in a matter of seconds if the shuttle's power supply was cut off. Thankfully, they came prepared for this scenario.

(Looks like this is the reason behind the airships' loss of control. Electricity will be lost if you venture into the 300 kilometers danger zone. No wonder we can't hear each other's voices, the communication system must be down. It should be the same with the shuttle's life support system as well.) Yao Yuan released his grasp on the control stick to unlatch the wolf-eye flashlight from his utility belt. The glare on the flashlight was so strong that it could cause temporary blindness if directed at one's eyes, so Yao Yuan was careful to aim it at the ceiling before switching it on.

Almost instantly, the room lit up in the reflection of the light. Ying, Ebon, and Liu Bai stood intensely with their weapons out; Ren Tao stood in front of Chou Yue, shielding her; while Zhang Heng had his Gaussian gun in one hand and his rifle in another as he scanned his surroundings.

With the arrival of light, all 12 of them turned to one another trying to speak but failed to do so, so they gave up before finally all turning to Yao Yuan.

Yao Yuan set his flashlight down on the floor, allowing it to continue shining at the ceiling. Straightening up, he signed some commands at Lee and then at Ying.

Lee immediately took out his own wolf-eye flashlight as he walked to the control panel. Pointing it out the window that sat above the control panel, he switched it on. The glare of the light was admittedly strong, but it still wasn't strong enough to pierce the darkness of space. Only the outlines of the metallic pieces crowding around them were revealed by the light. After all, the warship husk was 300 kilometers away!

Then Ying joined him. Activating his power, he looked out the window. After some time, he pointed at a location some distance away. Yao Yuan quickly signed for Ying and Lee to take a break.

(Now that we have a general direction of our destination, we need to find out whether this shuttle is still controllable...) Yao Yuan thought to himself. Jiggling the control stick, the shuttle slowly turned under his control. After turning about 180 degrees, the weak clump of lights, which was the Hope, appeared before

their eyes.

(Phew, it looks like even though the electricity has been shut down, stripping the shuttle of its automated functionalities, it still can be manually operated. No wonder both Zhang Heng and Chou Yue didn't sense any danger... there is a simple workaround to all this.) Yao Yuan turned the shuttle back around, down the direction where Ying was previously pointing.

By then, all of them knew the communicator had broken down, so they returned quietly to their stations. Only Chou Yue stood frozen at her spot. She was badly shaken by the whole incident. The sudden darkness was a tremendous shock to her. Tears that she was unable to wipe dried on her face. Feeling beside herself, she clung onto Ren Tao's arm.

Ren Tao, on the other hand, still wore his oblivious look... but this time, there was cogitation behind those seemingly vacant eyes.

In any case, the shuttle continued to move forward. There was nothing but an abyss around them. There was no visible change in scenery or even conversation to signify that time was even moving... so much so that it felt like they were traversing a blank space... After an incalculable period of time had passed, a dark outline gradually materialized before them.

When the flashlight finally caught parts of outline in its rays, the lights within the shuttle suddenly came back on! And just like that, it was as if the time spent in the dark hadn't even happened...

There was no clear explanation on why the spacesuit's battery

can work while the rest can't other than the word "physiology". So if I'm going to guess, I believe the spacesuit uses some sort of kinetic-electrical hybrid battery system so the electrical shut down doesn't fully affect the spacesuits' battery.

Chapter 114: Warship Husk!

"Of the 300 kilometers danger zone, only the 10 kilometers nearest to the warship will not send us into a blackout."

After the systems came back online, Yao Yuan didn't instantly continue their journey to the warship husk. Instead, he parked the shuttle to initiate multiple checks. He wanted to know their distance from the husk and the shuttle's internal conditions.

The examination lasted for 10 minutes, and after it finished, Yao Yuan shared the results with the rest of his party. Certain that everything was back to normal, they continued on to their destination.

The area of blank space came as a surprise, but it was definitely all show. However, as the shuttle came ever closer to the warship husk, Zhang Heng and Chou Yue both felt a tingling sense of incoming danger. Nevertheless, the feeling was not one that screamed of immediate threat... in fact, it was not unlike how they felt prior to the earthquake that shook the meteorite base.

This insidious feeling assaulted Yao Yuan as well.

This didn't raise any alarm for the party though because they had already expected to face some sort of dangerous encounter within the husk. In any case, they could not turn back now because humanity's ultimate survival in space depended on the success of this mission. The technological advancement that could be salvaged from within the warship would provide humanity with a

better standing in the great cosmos. As the saying goes, with great risk comes great rewards, so as dangerous as it might be, this was a mission that they must see to its very end!

Yao Yuan was ready to sacrifice a lot to claim the technology within the alien warship, be it a few more decades of the Hope idling within this star system, the death of his partners, or even his own!

This was because all the mentioned sacrifices combined were still less important than the 200 years that humanity would need if they were to enter their fourth industrial revolution the traditional way.

"...4 more kilometers to our destination. Everyone, we are nearing the husk. To be safe, let's all review our mission. First, Zhang Heng, Chou Yue?" With his hand over the controls, Yao Yuan asked of the party.

Zhang Heng replied hurriedly, "I am to sense the presence of immediate danger like the activation of internal defense mechanism."

Chou Yue hesitated. "Mine is to sense threats that are more long-term or drawn out, like the possibility of a self-destructive device in the warship husk."

Yao Yuan nodded before passing the question to his Black Star comrades.

"The Black Stars' mission is to be vigilant for traces of movement while protecting Zhang Heng, Chou Yue, and Ren Tao. Also, we are to set up a safety perimeter during searches and pit stops," Lee said, representing the whole group.

Ying added, "Using my power, I'm responsible for sniping high-armored machinery."

Ebon followed, "I'll provide backline support, but when normal weapons fail, I'm told to use the Gaussian gun."

"As the one responsible for everything explosive, it's my job to demolish locked doors or safe boxes with the smallest damage possible to the surroundings," said Wa Luo.

"As the information relay person, I will keep a constant eye on everyone's internal communicators. In situations where they are jammed, I will help relay information using the multi-frequency communicator to ensure a constant stream of communication," added Xiao Yan.

"As the so-called Thinker, I am tasked to provide solutions if we're stuck in an ambush or trap... But is that really useful?" Ren Tao finished.

Yao Yuan chuckled. "Frankly, I myself can't tell, but it's better to be safe than sorry. I'm not going to let anyone die because we're unprepared."

"Okay, we're officially entering the husk..."

Yao Yuan circled around the husk looking for an entrance. To be fair, since the warship husk was already torn apart, there were plenty of open apertures, but none of them served as a valid landing spot.

"It's no use. Fine, we'll use the mechanical arms to clamp the shuttle to the warship."

A stymied Yao Yuan announced. Guiding the shuttle to one of the biggest apertures, he released the shuttle's mechanical arms when they were about 1 meter away from the warship's edge. The arms latched onto the warship's metallic edge, and after a brief, violent shake, the shuttle stood secured in space.

"Right, I hope everyone's ready for an adventure."

Yao Yuan stood up from the driver's seat. Grabbing the space rifle beside him, he strode to the front of the party. Then the shuttle door opened to reveal a world of darkness. It was as if they were staring into a monster's gaping maw. Undeterred, Yao Yuan stepped out of the shuttle, yelling, "For Glory!"

"Or for death!" echoed the rest of the Black Star Unit as they moved to follow Yao Yuan.

The last to remain were Zhang Heng, Ren Tao, and Chou Yue. Without hesitation, Zhang Heng too jumped out of the shuttle

yelling the slogan. Finally, when it was only Ren Tao and Chou Yue, he asked, "So... who first?"

Pouting, Chou Yue mumbled, "That is such a corny slogan. Why did they pick something so cringe-worthy? Even the 'I'll be back' from Terminator 6 might be better, and that's saying a lot... Anyway, you know I don't like to be the last one out, so I'll go first."

Ren Tao smiled, and after Chou Yue got off the shuttle, he whispered under his breath, "I quite like the slogan actually." With that, he too descended the shuttle.

Standing at the entrance to the warship husk, Yao Yuan waited patiently for the whole party to assemble. After everyone was there and the Black Star Unit had their weapons at the ready, Yao Yuan finally switched on his wolf-eye flashlight.

The rays of light revealed a scene of absolute wreckage. There were punctures and holes made by explosions and tearing while metallic baubles and parts of differing sizes littered the general area. However, based on the husk's inner structure, the party still managed to envision its original glory.

In all honesty, there was a hint of disappointment that threaded through the group. This was because they were expecting a scene that was much more high tech and not something that looked so similar to the inner chambers of the Hope. With the exception of the walls and partitions that were thinner than the ones on the Hope, making the space wider, the structure was about 70 to 80 percent similar to the insides of the Hope.

Nevertheless, since there was neither danger nor findings in the entrance area, the group moved deeper into the husk. Wary of the zero-gravity environment, extra cautiousness was present in every step taken. That combined with the lack of lighting and the multiple of obstructions that littered the floor made their progress regrettably slow.

Hugging the walls, the party moved steadily into the husk. About 10 minutes later, they saw lights flickering some distance away before them. This meant that the corridor in front of them still had access to an electrical current!

"...Proceed cautiously. Be mindful of your partner," Yao Yuan advised.

The group then moved carefully to the flickering light source. As they stepped closer to their destination, the amount of damage they could see around them got significantly lesser. The area they were heading toward was making out to be the most fully-preserved space after the devastation. If there was a discovery to find, this would be where they were going to find it.

As they reached the end of a long corridor, a dim, red light suddenly flashed around them. Almost instantaneously, both Zhang Heng and Chou Yue shouted, "Danger! Danger incoming!"

Hearing that, Yao Yuan yelled, "Retreat! Move back to the place where there are no flashing lights!" Turning around, he used the wall to climb his way back to safety.

Others did the same. However, before they could get even 10 meters away, a metallic partition started to drop down further down the corridor they were in, intending to cut off their path.

"Sh*t!" Yao Yuan instinctively grabbed hold of his rifle, but he soon realized that that was futile. All the structural weak points had already crumbled during the previous destruction, and sadly, there was no opening big enough for them to pass through in sight.

Finally, the partition closed with a tremor, and the party had no way left but forward!

The mysterious source of danger was also imminent...

Chapter 115: Robot!

Yao Yuan was already searching for solutions before the partition dropped completely. He looked left and then right before yelling, "The hole on the wall, follow me!"

Before he finished his sentence, [Yao Yuan had already leaped over the hole](#). He landed in a room whose door had already been blasted off and miscellaneous broken machine parts covered the floor. Training his weapon at the opening where the door once stood, he yelled behind him, "Don't let your guard down! We are moving forward! Ebon and Wa Luo, you two bring up the rear!"

Yao Yuan took big steps towards the opening... but he remained careful. Try as he might, he could only go so fast in zero-gravity space.

Yao Yuan involuntarily moved his eyes to the red lights blinking at the top of his helmet, but he quickly caught himself. It was still not the time to employ the one-use propellers.

The propellers must be reserved for emergencies only because they would only stop after they had exhausted their fuel. Attached to the back of the spacesuits' shoulders, waist, and heels, the propeller ports, the size of a coin, were impressive marvels!

They were emergency movement devices that made use of man's newest battery model!

The technology was harvested from the internal mechanism of

the music box. Even Yao Yuan was impressed at the inroads the scientists had managed within the 15 days after the music box was discovered.

The music box's battery was the size of a button, but it held an energy storage that was tens of thousands of times larger than normal lithium batteries!

It was so extraordinary that it could hardly be described as a battery. It was more akin to a high-energy electromagnetic device. Such an object the size of a button could bring immeasurable progress to the fields of Gaussian technology, nanotech, and electromagnetic technology.

It was a device that was well beyond man's scientific possibility at the time!

However, while it was something man couldn't create from scratch, with the presence of a replica, duplication was entirely possible...

The fact that it could be duplicated proved once more that the technological level of this alien race wasn't so far off from the Hope's. Some of their technologies might seem far-fetched, but scientists pointed out that they were already in the theoretical stage for some of them. Further contact with this alien civilization would only hurry that process along.

The batteries that powered the rocket propellers were such duplicated replicas. Through the process of electrolysis, the

battery supercharged its surrounding chemical carbides into forming thin wisps of powerful corpuscular streams which then propelled the wearer forward at high speeds. That was the theoretical mechanism behind the rocket propellers.

Nevertheless, not many knew of the existence of this future-tech battery. The actual number of the people who were in the know was less than 100, and of those 100, 90 percent of them were pertinent scientists and researchers. Yao Yuan had a hard time explaining this propeller to Chou Yue and Ren Tao without divulging top secret information. It was very likely that this battery would spearhead mankind's fourth industrial revolution!

(Yes, I mustn't lose sight of our goal. The catalyst for the fourth revolution has to be inside this junkyard. Replicating the battery inside the music box alone has already brought incremental progress to the Hope's technological level. Understanding it fully will definitely introduce a giant leap to the Hope's scientific standard!) Yao Yuan reminded himself. Gritting his teeth, he pushed forward... His eyes were burning with the determination of a man who wasn't afraid to face death!

"Quickly, we must get away from this area that still has electrical currents!"

Leaping out of the room, Yao Yuan unhesitatingly waved his team down another broken down corridor. They had only taken several steps before the world around Yao Yuan silenced and he sensed a danger source rushing towards them!

"Be careful! Danger incoming!"

"From the front!"

Zhang Heng and Chou shouted in unison. With their warning still reverberating around the walls and Yao Yuan barely lifting his space rifle, a luminous robot appeared in front of them, floating down their direction fast!

Yes, the robot was floating. It was about 30 centimeters off the ground to be precise, and it was gliding towards the group with lighting speed. But most surprisingly... other than the few weak spots of lights that lit up its joints, the robot didn't appear to be corporeal; like a ghost, it floated freely in zero-gravity space.

Could the robot be... a tentacle monster?!

The thing was a cylindrical, alien-made machinery of some sort. Four tentacle-like appendages that mirrored robotic arms came out of the top and middle end of the creature as it floated above ground on a spinning, circular plate. The creature wasn't at its top form because the damage on its body was conspicuous, two of its appendages were torn apart, and a giant wound cut across its torso, revealing the gears within. Regardless, it still posed a threatening presence, especially when it got increasingly closer, radiating a milky-white glow.

"Aaaaah!"

Standing in the middle of the group, a panicked Ebon roared. Training his machine gun at the robot, he muscled his way

forward to the front of the group where Yao Yuan stood.

"Stop! Calm yourself!" Yao Yuan yelled when he realized what Ebon was up to. Unlike the other Black Star members who respected him as the leader, Ebon looked at him with a starry-eyed admiration. Ebon had once said on the battlefield that he would die before he would allow any harm to come to Yao Yuan!

As Ebon pushed others out of the way, the color of the glow surrounding the robot started to deepen. First it changed to yellow, then pink, red, green, and finally blue... Ebon used his elbow to push Yao Yuan behind him as he pointed his machine gun straight at the robot, his eyes bulging and his whole body tense.

"Calm down!" Yao Yuan shouted again as he pulled Ebon backwards. After he regained his position at the front of the group, he added, "The thing moves incredibly fast, so if it truly meant us harm, it wouldn't be standing there now. I suspect there's some restriction preventing it from attacking us! Don't you agree, Ren Tao?"

Ren Tao had his hands out, shielding Chou Yue, who stood behind him. He replied instantly, "I concur. Since we're in the middle of an alien warship, it should come as no surprise that there are alien guards... after all, isn't it the same on the Hope? That said, even if we don't have the proper ID, it probably won't attack us indiscriminately!"

"ID, huh?" Yao Yuan echoed. "Right, some scientists did mention that in the future, for the sake of convenience, ID might be embedded in one's arms or even head to replace conventional ID

cards. Of course, to account for fringe cases where the ID chip or the scanning device in the robot is broken, it is unlikely the robot guards are programmed to attack indiscriminately on sight..."

Right then, Ying, Liu Bai, Lee, and most of the Black Stars had also reached Yao Yuan's side. Ebon roared, "Have you two lost it? The robot is standing right in front of us and you're still arguing scientific theories?!"

"Chill," Ren Tao shrugged. "Didn't you see that the color around the robot has changed back to normal? I believe that as long as we don't do anything hostile, it will not rashly attack us. I bet it's still trying to analyze our group, which has no proper ID. We should take this opportunity to learn more about this warship, things like how many robot guards it has, what weapons these guards carry, where is their zone of defense, and of course, the possibility of bypassing our lack of ID conundrum. As long as we avoid unnecessary conflict, things should be just fine..."

"Shut it, you d*ck!" Ebon howled in return. "I wasn't talking to you..."

"Ebon!" Yao Yuan cut him off. "Who are you calling a d*ck? Ren Tao is now part of our team, so watch your mouth!"

Ebon mumbled recalcitrantly, but eventually he apologized. Ren Tao wasn't paying him much attention though. He stared directly at the robot as if he were in trance. Several seconds later, he told Yao Yuan, "Something's off... The robot's light has returned to its normal white, but it doesn't seem to be staying that way. Plus, the fact that it's standing there without any response while blocking

our way is a bit weird..."

Yao Yuan too had the same suspicion. Lo and behold, the color of the robot slowly changed to yellow, but it still showed no sign of moving... "It's communicating with us! I bet it's producing some kind of sound, but we can't hear it because we're in space! Then again, we wouldn't be able to understand what it's saying anyway. I believe it wants us to drop our weapons and follow it to perhaps their police station or barracks..."

"Our failure to do so might cause it to start attacking us!"

As Yao Yuan explained, the color on the robot turned a faded yellow... They didn't have much time left!

There wasn't much of an explanation about why there is suddenly a hole when it had been explicitly stated that there wasn't such a thing in the previous chapter. My guess is that tremor from the partition shook the foundation enough that one such opening peels off wide enough to form this hole.

Chapter 116: Bait and Switch!

"Tell me, Ren Tao. Do you think this is the only robot on this ship?" noticing the robot's color turning yellow, Yao Yuan quickly asked.

All the clues started to line up in Ren Tao's head as silence descended upon his world. He replied almost instantly, "No, there has to be more than one. Previously, Zhang Heng and my sis sensed the danger coming from another direction different from where this robot came from. However, since there isn't another robot behind us at this moment, I believe these robots have their own zone of activity, and the one before us is only responsible for this zone!"

"I too come to the same conclusion... Now, a second question," Yao Yuan added as his hand went searching for the Gaussian gun strapped to his waist. "Do you think the other robots will respond aggressively if we attack this one before us?"

"Absolutely!" Ren Tao answered. "It took us about 10 seconds to move from that previous area to this one, but this robot was already waiting for us. Such an impressive reactionary time means that there has to be a shared communication system between all the robots. Harming one will definitely tip off the others!"

Yao Yuan already had his hand over the gun, but he didn't unsheathe it. Without turning about, he asked Ren Tao, "One last question... Do you think these robots are armed with long-range weapons using high-penetration or highly-explosive ammo?"

"..." This time Ren Tao hesitated for 3 seconds before replying, "It's unlikely. From what I've observed so far, they don't have powerful AI, but simple ones to facilitate identification. It doesn't appear like they are aware that the ship's ruined and there is no life remaining on it. In other words, they are only programs. And in an intact warship, it's highly unlikely that they're programmed to use high-penetration or highly-explosive weaponry!"

"So you mean even if they are equipped with long-range weapons, they won't be able to penetrate metallic walls?"

Then Yao Yuan growled, in a low voice, "Black Stars, we'll fire in 3 seconds! Take down this robot asap! After that, follow my instructions closely!"

"3, 2, 1..."

"Fire!"

The first to unload was Ebon. The machine gun he was using was a specifically modified prototype that could be used in space. The recoil was still present, but at least it would no longer stray away from its target.

Thanks to the aforementioned recoiling force, the bullet hail pushed all 10 members of Black Star Unit, Zhang Heng included, backwards. The lack of friction in space meant that the backwards momentum would not stop without external aid. The human wave of 10 crashed into Chou Yue and Ren Tao, carrying the 2 unfortunate souls with it. It wasn't until several of them managed

to grab hold of holes on the walls and ground for support that the party of 12 stopped rolling backwards.

When they straightened up, the robot was already blown far back into the dark chasm. Not long after, a resounding explosion shook the warship husk.

After the group blasted the robot away, Yao Yuan was certain manmade weapons could do damage to the warship's robot guards, albeit one that was infinitely small. Based on the bullet wounds on the robot's shell, many of the bullets barely dented its surface!

The ones that pierced the shell and inflicted damage were the ones fired by the Gaussian guns.

Yao Yuan, however, knew they didn't have the time to linger. Without missing a beat, he yelled, "Back to the room we leaped out of! Quick!"

Using the punctured wall as some sort of a horizontal rock-climbing surface, Yao Yuan clambered his way back to the room. Along the way, he asked, "Zhang Heng, Chou Yue, is there any danger surrounding us?"

Zhang Heng reported instantly, "Yes, there are sources of danger book-ending this corridor, the blocked corridor we escaped from, and there are some more moving towards us from the level above."

Chou Yue confirmed, "He's right. They are coming onto us fast."

"Okay, thanks for that. I have a clearer grasp on the map of this ship now. I believe the blocked corridor and the one where we stumbled across the robot are connected. All the robot guards should be gathering at where we are now, and the one closest to us should be the robot that's from the blocked corridor. He should be rushing down the connected corridor as we speak," Yao Yuan explained as he leaped back into the room. The rest of the party followed.

Still catching their breath, Yao Yuan ordered, "Wa Luo, I want you to set up some mines here. Make it so that they detonate 5 seconds after activation!"

"Yes, Sir!" Wa Luo moved to oblige even though he, and basically everyone else, had no idea why Yao Yuan would deploy such an order. This way, they themselves wouldn't be able to escape the explosion, but they knew better than to question Yao Yuan's battlefield expertise.

Yao Yuan then turned to the rest. "Zhang Heng, Chou Yue, I want the 2 of you to focus on divining the distance and numbers of the robots pursuing us. When they approach the corridor outside of this room, I want you to inform me immediately. Then, at my command, everyone else will jump back through the hole to the blocked corridor and immediately run down the open end. Be quick, understand?"

Zhang Heng nodded, but not before asking, "Both corridors are guarded by robots though! Aren't we just jumping into their grasp?"

"No, all the robots should be coming this way to finish us off, so the blocked corridor... should be free of robots by then!" Ren Tao suddenly offered.

Unsatisfied, it was Chou Yue's turn to ask, "But won't the robot from the other corridor just come through the opening like we did?"

Yao Yuan caught Ren Tao's eyes and nodded. "They won't because there's a wall between us."

The rest looked at the wall in question and sighed in disbelief. The "wall" had a giant opening on it where both man and robot could easily pass through. Barely standing, it could hardly be called a wall.

"We're dealing with robots here." Yao Yuan chuckled darkly as he supervised Wa Luo's work. "They might have AI, but they lack common sense and logic. As long as the frame of the wall remains standing, they will treat it as a partition and will not think to cross through it. Therefore, to grab us, they will definitely take the long route around because in their AI, we're already cornered in this room and there is no other exit other than the one in front of us!"

"I get it now!" Lee shouted. "So we're essentially the bait that'll lure them to this room. While the explosives deal with the robots, we'll be escaping through the opening. That's the plan, right?"

"Not we, but me..." Yao Yuan continued seriously. "As the All-

Rounder, I'm the perfect candidate for the bait. I'll stay until the last 5 seconds prior to the moment the robots will enter this room. Then I'll activate the detonation and catch up with the rest of you."

The scope of Yao Yuan's plan silenced the rest of his party, only Ebon alone roared, "No! You're the captain of the ship; your life is more important than anyone of ours. I'm just a Perceptor, but I'm willing stay to be the bait. In fact, why don't you let Ying and Zhang Heng stay with me? The three of us combined are stronger than your All-Rounder power! No matter what, you can't be the bait!"

Ying too added, "5 seconds is too short. It's impossible to escape from the range of all these explosives with just 5 seconds... Leave the mission to me."

"It has to be 5 seconds, or perhaps even less, because if the robots realize that there's already no one in the room before then, the plan will definitely fail! I'm the only one who can escape the room in 5 seconds, so I have to be the bait!"

Yao Yuan continued, "My power as the Perceptor grants me hyper-reflexivity, while the power of the Seeker gives me super-sight, and Diviner the power of prediction. All these combined with the rocket propeller system allows me the speed I need to get out of the room in 5 seconds. In other words, I'm the only candidate that would have any chance at survival! Got it?!"

"Plus, this is not a discussion, it's an order!"

It was obvious that none of the Black Star members were willing to send their leader to his death, but faced with the incontestable nature of an order, they resigned. And thus, the room sat quietly waiting for Wa Luo to finish his work.

About 10 seconds after Wa Luo's explosives were set, both Zhang Heng and Chou Yue scrunched up their faces, yelling, "They're coming, the one leading is incredibly close to us!"

"Remember to be on the lookout for my signal!"

Yao Yuan unclasped his Gaussian gun wordlessly and took another away from Chou Yue's shivering hands. Pointing both guns forward, Yao Yuan took a deep breath and shouted, "Go!"

However, taking the direction opposite from everyone else, Yao Yuan charged towards the room entrance!

Chapter 117: The Line between Life and Death!

This was not the first time Yao Yuan had used his Homo Evolutis power in combat.

He had the unfortunate experience of doing so during one of his previous missions at the space station.

Of course, he didn't know he was using his power then.

The truth of the matter was that the central Homo Evolutis experience, which was the suspension of human senses, especially that of sound, was not something that was uncommon on the battlefield. At the height of combat, or even when one's life is seriously threatened, many reported the sensation of having lost the feeling of pain, and that of hearing. Some said in those situations that one could barely hear oneself.

This is a psychological phenomenon that is widely reported on. One doesn't truly lose the sense of sound or pain, but rather the trauma one was under was so overwhelming that it shut down those senses.

On the other hand, the Homo Evolutis power was more than a simple twitch in the brain, for it had been proven time and again to observably heighten one's natural abilities. It would not be wrong to call Yao Yuan a superhuman then, but only in the sense that his human potential was further unlocked and not because he could fly or could shoot laser out of his eyes...

Speaking of the Homo Evolutis powers, Yao Yuan, in this particular combat situation, used 3.

The first was the power of the Perceptor, which drastically increased his reaction time, second was the power of the Seeker, which greatly improved his sight, and last was the power of the Diviner, which gave him the ability to predict danger. Individually, each of his powers was less powerful than the pure version wielded by respectively Ebon, Ying, and Zhang Heng. However, when all his powers were used in sync with one another, they could achieve even supernatural effects...

While Yao Yuan was rolling over to the entrance, Ren Tao was helping Chou Yue over the opening in the wall. Yao Yuan, ever careful, didn't rush headfirst into the fray. Instead, he used his diviner's power to predict the enemies' location and then unloaded his bullets at that general direction.

The lack of a definitive pop from the gunshots and the unexpectedly strong whiplash from the Gaussian guns unhinged Yao Yuan's balance. Thanks to his Perceptor power, he recovered quickly. Leaning into the whiplash's momentum, he landed a kick on the wall he was falling towards, and the rebounding force sent him careening out of the room. At the end of the corridor, a robot crumbled in a rain of sparks.

There was a noticeable lack of explosion because instead of relying on pure firepower, the Gaussian guns relied on strong penetration, and they disabled the robot by severing its internal chips as well as wiring.

"It's finally time to test my own limits..."

As Yao Yuan took another deep breath, his eyes moved resolutely to the red light on the top of his helmet. It was time to make use of the propellers.

"...Yao Yuan, even though I've spent 1 whole year doing in-depth research on the Homo Evolutis, I still doubt the actual cause of this Virus X. No matter, that's beside the point. What I meant to say was that this Homo Evolutis is probably some sort of biological adaptation. Just like how there's always a small pocket of immune cases during period of epidemic, this power is most likely how man adapts to the cosmic environment... or threats," Ivan explained.

"...Here's the thing you asked for, or rather, the best version we can come up with in such short notice. Using the new battery prototype, it can operate upwards of 5 minutes... under the best circumstances. If you were not so eager to grab this alien technology, my team could have more time to perfect the technology, but... you're the boss. Just a precaution: none of the prototypes lasted for more than 3 minutes in all three sets of our trial runs, so keep that in mind," advised Bo Li as she handed Yao Yuan the propeller-equipped spacesuits.

"Cosmic threats and 3 minutes, huh?"

Yao Yuan continued inhaling, for he hoped the surfeit of oxygen could help invigorate his brain.

Yao Yuan felt 3 distinct spots tremor on his back before a strong force sent him flying straight forward. He took several last-minute turns during his deathly charge, but because his line of sight was so in tandem with the direction his body was facing, it felt like he was dashing down a straight line.

A total of 3 robots were coming towards him from both ends of the corridor, and using his diviner's power, he could tell about 10 more were tailing him.

(Damn, if a warship husk already has so many robot guards in one area, won't there be an army of robots on the main battleship's broken husk?)

In that unlikely moment, a thought came into Yao Yuan's mind, but it disappeared as quickly as it arrived. Yao Yuan needed undivided focus to handle the robots that were closing in on him and the propellers.

Seconds before he would slam into a wall, Yao Yuan nudged his shoulder forward and his body made an emergency turn. Using his abdominal strength, he managed to swerve 180 degrees around. Now with the wall behind him, he instinctually kicked against it, and that propelled him forward.

It was not a moment too soon because the minute he bounced off the wall, it was riddled with bullet holes. The bullets came from the 2 robots closest to Yao Yuan, which had their tentacle-like arms materialized into gun barrels.

(The first one)

Yao Yuan did another pirouette, and in the instant, he turned around and fired off at the chest of one of the robots. The robot convulsed for a short moment before finally crumbling to the floor.

Yao Yuan bounced off the wall before the bullets could get him. Escaping certain death, Yao Yuan pulled another trigger, ending the other robot.

(Second one)

It was like a scene out of a superhero movie. Yao Yuan was effectively teleporting between the two opposite walls, stopping at each for barely a second.

It was to be expected that the propellers would grant superhuman speed in space, because there was no counteracting forces like wind resistance or gravity. Normal human beings could easily meet their ends by slamming into surfaces at an extremely high speed.

It would require intense concentration to just move using the propellers in space, much less committing to the stunts Yao Yuan was doing. He had to pay attention to factors like the trajectory of the robots' and his own bullets, the angle of his body, the area of contact his foot should make, the choice of retaliating or evading, and many more.

Yao Yuan's heroism was possible not only because his 3 powers were in use, but also because, unbeknownst to him, his Thinker's power was also in effect.

The complicated dynamics of the situation shouldn't be underestimated. The absence of a constantly downwards directional pull of gravity would unhinge the most veteran of combatants. Yao Yuan would find himself on the ceiling looking down on the killer robots or he would find the world being turned upside-down. He had to adapt to these varying situations in a matter of seconds and end his opponents before they could end him.

With a loud bang, Yao Yuan could feel a sharp pain pierce his body. As impressive as his moves were, Yao Yuan was grossly outnumbered. Furthermore, even if Yao Yuan had superhuman abilities, the robots weren't lagging much behind with their scientifically-accurate aim and lack of fatigue. When Yao Yuan took down his fifth robot, around 10 robots had gathered around the corridor. Assaulted by a barrage of bullets, he was finally hit on his upper thigh. This severely impacted his dexterity. Last-minute veers away from the wall became an increasingly common occurrence.

Yao Yuan had a bigger worry on his mind though... Does this mean that his combat suit was pierced?

Yao Yuan breathed in deeply to calm down, and with an acrobatic twirl off 2 surfaces, he flipped back into the room which was laid with mines. Dropping the 2 Gaussian guns, he grabbed hold of one of the fixtures in the room with one of his hands to slow down his

forward-moving momentum. His other hand went searching for the bullet wound on his calf.

(Thankfully, there's no puncture. Just like how Ren Tao predicted, the robots aren't programmed to use high-penetration bullets in the warship... Then again, this spacesuit sure is sturdy; it held even after being shot... It saved my life, but it looks like the femur's fractured.)

Yao Yuan was calculating his course of action, but suddenly he heard screaming coming from his communicator. It sounded like Ying and Zhang Heng.

"Yao Yuan, get over here quick. Another partition is coming down the end of this corridor."

"Quick! It's almost completely closed!"

"F*ck, let me go. I'm not going to let Ol' Cap'n die alone!"

Yao Yuan was unable to piece together the whole picture with these snippets of information, but as far as he could tell, there was another partition coming down on the still open end of the other corridor.

Yao Yuan made a split-second decision to click down on the detonator. Then, it was his intention to utilize the propeller to send him dashing through the hole on the wall.

(Four...)

Yao Yuan's broken femur incapacitated his ability to expediently align his body down the direction he intended to head towards. He finally got the angle right after some fidgeting around, but by then, his Diviner's sense was already tingling.

(Three...)

As the propellers powered on, Yao Yuan shot through the hole like a loosened arrow. After his whole body entered the blocked corridor, Yao Yuan did a mid-air twirl by extending his hands and using the center of his body as a fulcrum. His unharmed feet tapped against the ground mid-twirl, and that changed the trajectory of his flight, sending him away from the already down partition.

(Two...)

The twirl caused Yao Yuan's flight to be decidedly slanted, but just before he would crash into the wall, he extended his hands once more. Instead of bouncing himself off it, his hands caught the surface for purchase to further propel him forward. With that, he righted himself as he shot directly ahead.

(One...)

In the blink of an eye, Yao Yuan glided through the 20 centimeters that were still left at the bottom of the dropping

partition. Right at that moment, the room at the other end of the partition exploded. Still caught in the memory of that room, Yao Yuan could feel the fire blistering his skin.

With a violent quake, the partition dropped down completely, effectively cutting off the shockwaves of the explosions. At the same time, Yao Yuan careened into a wall of bodies that stopped him in his tracks.

Drained both physically and mentally, Yao Yuan dropped into a deep unconsciousness almost instantly.

At the last moment, with regards to the line that separated life and death...

Yao Yuan came out the other end ultimately victorious.

Chapter 118: Strategy to Claim the Warship Husk!

Yao Yuan opened his eyes to a warm glow. Swaddled in a warm blanket, he hadn't felt so comfortable and relaxed in a long time, which in and of itself was alarming. He quickly scanned his surroundings and mentally checked his body's condition.

(My upper thigh's bandaged in plaster, so it does appear that I've suffered from broken bones. I'm no longer in my combat suit, and this looks like the Hope's infirmary. So they've carried me back to the Hope... I wonder what else happened on the warship husk... Were there any deaths? Did we manage to carry some of the broken robot parts back to the Hope? Have there been other discoveries?) Yao Yuan thought to himself. Suddenly, he felt an intense ache in his head as if it a vise was clamping down on it. Unable to tolerate the pain, he screamed out in agony.

His scream attracted 4 Black Star close guards who stood outside his room to come rushing in. Expecting an assault, they entered the room with their weapons drawn. Their experience as Special Forces made them spread out to secure the perimeter while one of them squatted by Yao Yuan's side, shielding him.

"The room's clear! The Captain seems to be in extreme pain. Call the doctor, quick!" The person who knelt beside Yao Yuan quickly performed a check on Yao Yuan's signs of life. By then, Yao Yuan had stopped screaming, but he sweated profusely, gritting his teeth. This was the face of a man who was fighting for life.

The 4 close guards were shocked by the quick development of

events, but their formal training helped them speedily recover. One of them pressed the emergency button beside Yao Yuan's bed and another kept a close hand on his pulse while talking slowly to Yao Yuan to keep him from slipping into unconsciousness, the third one kept a vigil over Yao Yuan's body, while the last lopped out of the room to get the doctors.

In less than 2 minutes, the doctor on duty and a group of nurses entered the room. Yao Yuan had started foaming at the mouth, and the whites of his eyes were showing. After feeling his pulse and breathing, the doctor ordered, "Give him a shot of tranquilizer and painkillers, now. And then get me his X-rays. I'm afraid we have overlooked some internal wounds the captain might have suffered..."

That was all Yao Yuan could capture before the chemicals took effect and fatigue overtook him. He barely uttered a sentence before slipping back into sleep.

"...You're feeling tired now, aren't you?"

"Hmm... Yes, you're right. I'm physically, mentally, and spiritually tired. I feel like even my soul needs a rest..."

"...Then why don't you use this opportunity to take a good rest? But promise me you'll work that much harder after this. For me and our child's sake, you mustn't slack off..."

"Of course... I'll do anything for our child..."

When Yao Yuan opened his eyes next, he feigned yawning and surreptitiously wiped the tears that had gathered at the corner of his eyes.

He found himself sleeping on another bed, but this time it came with a decontamination layer, not unlike the one they had at the Hope's ICU room. Not far away from him was a nurse who was trying her best to not nod off. Yao Yuan calmed himself and surveyed his surroundings.

After some time, he uttered in a hoarse voice, "Hello, nurse, I'm awake."

Shocked into response, the nurse almost tripped on her way over to Yao Yuan's bedside. After checking all the monitors around Yao Yuan's bed, she exhaled in relief and steepled her hands in apology, saying, "Captain, I'm so sorry. I stayed up late last night catching up on a drama series. I swear I'm normally not as clumsy as this, so could you please keep this between us and not tell my supervisor?"

Yao Yuan smiled. "Don't worry, I won't rat you out, but please don't stay up late again. Your work requires full concentration. Human lives hang in the balance here."

The 20 something nurse stuck out her tongue innocently and replied, "Captain, please wait for a moment. I'll go get the doctor."

Before she left, Yao Yuan asked, "How long have I been asleep?"

"12 days," answered the nurse as she walked out of the room.

Memories from his previous resuscitation slowly came back to Yao Yuan. The ghost of the pain from back then still lingered. Wary of exacerbating his situation, Yao Yuan let his focus wander around the room, waiting for the doctor to arrive.

Doctor, nurses and guards arrived not long after.

After another series of check-ups, Yao Yuan asked hesitantly, "Doctor, tell me honestly, is there something wrong with my brain? Like a tumor, or I've contracted some weird brain virus? Please be frank so that I can arrange for the Hope's future."

The doctor shook his head. "Don't worry, Captain. Your results have come out negative for all the tests that we've done. In fact, you're at the pink of health. The CAT scan showed you were in deep sleep for the past 13 days, so you weren't in a coma. But I'll be frank, we were quite worried should you decide to continue sleeping."

"13 days?" Yao Yuan scanned the crowd for the nurse. He found her pulling an innocent face in the crowd while stealthily begging him to keep his promise. Yao Yuan smiled in spite of himself and decided to let it go.

More tests followed, and in the process, several government officers, Black Star members, Ren Tao, Chou Yue, members from the Academy, all came to pay Yao Yuan a visit. They totaled up to about 200 people, and they had to line up on a field in front of the

hospital because the hospital wasn't large enough to accommodate such a crowd.

The mass of people in turn had attracted more people, and it didn't take too long for the field to throng with life. Many westerners even came with banners in their hands, ready for a celebration.

Inside, Guang Zhen was relaying to Yao Yuan the things that had happened on the Hope in the past 13 days.

First, it took 9 hours for the warship husk exploration team to return to the Hope. Other than exhaustion, no one was hurt. The moment they descended from the shuttle and went through the decontamination room, most collapsed on the spot.

Soldiers, scientists, and government officers who stood by waiting rapidly rushed into the shuttle to inspect its load. There were 5 relatively intact robot remains and alien products of varying sizes. After removing the spacesuits, they discovered the injury on Yao Yuan's thigh and immediately rushed him to the infirmary. Everyone else was sent to the hospital to recuperate.

Yao Yuan was still in slumber when everyone awoke the day after... "The first time you rose was 2 days after, but that period of cognizance didn't last for long and, from what I've heard, was critical and painful. The hospital conducted more tests after that, but all the reports said you were fine."

While they were waiting for more medical machines to be

wheeled into the room, Guang Zhen continued.

"There was nothing of note in the first week, but inflammatory statements started to circulate among the public after you'd been in bed for more than 7 days. They said that you had entered a vegetative state and I will usurp the administrative power to remodel the Hope under a draconian rule. And that's not even the worst. Some doomsday cult started a rumor that we're sinners for having escaped God's rapture, while some mysterious party said that since the alien civilization behind the junkyard has been proven to be more advanced than ours, we should find some ways to appeal to them so that they would teach and lead us."

Guang Zhen concluded with much derision and anger.

Yao Yuan, on the other hand, sat quietly and listened. After the inspection had been completed, the doctor once again declared Yao Yuan was fit to go but expressed the hope that he would remain in the hospital for further observation.

Yao Yuan declined on the spot. There were simply too many things he needed to take care of. While the inspection was going on, Yao Yuan tried exercising his mind and realized with much relief that the pain was gone. Since the doctor couldn't provide him with an answer, Yao Yuan speculated that the pain was the result of him exhausting 3 superhuman powers at the same time. Nobody knew what the side-effects of overdoing the All-Rounder state was, so Yao Yuan concluded that this was probably it.

"Ol' Wong, I know we have to nip these issues at their buds before they unsettle the ship's societal structure. Rest assured that

I will take care of them carefully and firmly, so I hope you can leave them to me... But now we have a bigger fish to fry. I want you to help me train a troop of about 300 soldiers to get them familiarized with space combat. Other than that, we also have to increase the productivity for combat suit prototype 1, Gaussian guns, and space-use shuttles.

If a small exploratory team is not going to cut it, we're going to overcome these warship husks by the numbers!"

Chapter 119: Rise of the Machines!

"I'm sure everyone present has gone through the video of the exploration many times. It's true that the team escaped death by the breath of a hair, and we've also come across many inexplicable questions. I hope some of them have been answered in the 13 days I was asleep."

Yao Yuan had asked for a meeting at the war-room the afternoon he was discharged from the hospital. Attendees included the rest of the exploration team and representatives from the Academy, Barracks, and Workshop.

Yao Yuan continued, "First, I would like to know why there is a danger zone 300 kilometers around the warship husks. Is it caused by electromagnetic, or radio-signal interference, or some other more advanced hampering technology? And most importantly, is there a way to bypass it?"

All the scientists shifted their heads away from Yao Yuan until the leader stood up and said, "Captain, we've fired off 5 more sets of the pilotless airships in the past 13 days using special devices to counter both electromagnetic and radio-signal interference, but they were to no avail. All forms of electronic signals disappeared the moment they entered the danger zone... it was like the area barred the entry of all electronic signals."

"So we still can't find a reason, huh?" Yao Yuan frowned, but he added conciliatorily, "That's fine. After all, we're dealing with a more advanced civilization, so I'm sure the mystery will be solved in time... Well, let's move on to the next set of questions. How do

the robot guards achieve mobility? I noticed that they didn't have an exhaust or propellers to aid in their movement, so how do they move so easily through zero-gravity space?"

"They rely on some kind of electromagnetic force."

This time it was Bo Li who stood up. She added, "Based on the analysis on the robot samples that were brought back, the circular plate that held them up were electromagnetic products. As long as they are in a metallic environment, they can rely on the electromagnetic tension formed between the plate and the metallic surface for the purpose of movement. Furthermore, there is a mini particle accelerator inside the circular plate to help with changing of directions and speeds.

"Not only that, we've managed to unveil the 3 types of weapon these robots carry. The first is a set of high-voltage tentacle arms that are perfect for close-quarter combat.

"Second is a type of medium artillery that's similar to our own modified space rifles. They are the least harmful because I believe they are designed to be used inside the warship, so they won't pose much harm to the ship's structure.

The last is a type of Gaussian electromagnetic weaponry. It is definitely not something that can be used inside the warship. In space, it can fire off bullets that could reach up to the speed of 2840 kilometers per second. That's almost 1/100 of the speed of light! The ammo for these weapons is some sort of metallic spheres that are about 10 nanometers in size. Its destructive power is immense. For example, it could easily shred the Hope's walls like they're

made of paper!"

Bo Li's revelation sent chills down Yao Yuan's spine. After he collected himself, he continued, "So it is as I predicted. These robots are not only used for defense, they're used for offense as well... Is there anything else you've found out from the robots?"

Bo Li sat down to let another researcher take the floor. Yao Yuan recognized this person. He was the Hope's expert on computer hardware. He was leading the effort to dissect and understand the Hope's central mainframe.

"Captain, we managed to salvage some processing chips from the robots' internal framework. They are slightly more powerful than our conventional CPU, albeit much more compact in size. However..." the researcher paused, scratching his chin. "The chip contains some sort of external lock that destabilizes most of its uses. This lock also acts as a form of cell... something..."

"Cellular battery," Bo Li beside him offered.

"Yes, cellular battery. It could release a contained electrical charge almost instantly if it receives the signal to do so. The charge is powerful enough to create a plasmatic explosion that could easily wipe out the chip and its surrounding structure," the researcher concluded with a sigh.

Yao Yuan was stunned. He was unsure of the chip's significance until Chou Yue poked Ren Tao in his back, who then lazily added, "We've looked over this set-up's purpose while you were asleep and

we've narrowed it down to several possibilities. First is to prevent their technology from being stolen, and another is as a self-destructive last resort.

"However, there are obvious logical loopholes in these 2 hypotheses. For the first, this civilization is, like the Hope, a space nomadic race, but with technology that's far more advanced than ours. The Academy predicted them to be in a stage that's equivalent to our fourth or nearing fifth industrial revolution. It's unlikely for them to be afraid of technological thievery because the enemy they would face would either be drastically backwards like us, or so much more advanced that their technology would be worthless. So unless they are shielding their technology from themselves, the first scenario is quite unlikely.

"The second scenario is hard to believe as well. Even though the battery could create a plasma explosion, its range would be too small to cause any actual harm. The size of the explosion is only as big as the robots themselves, so... this set-up is more likely to harm the robots themselves than their adversary!"

"Self-harming?" The concept crossed Yao Yuan's mind and initiated a strange train of thoughts, but he quietly waited for Ren Tao to finish.

Ren Tao resumed, "As I've said, the civilization's incredibly advanced, and this could be seen from their military make-up. It is completely automated. A military that has no fear of death or fatigue, it could be said to be the perfect future version of military.

"This might sound like I'm peddling science fiction, but its

supremacy could be seen from our foray into the warship husk. A completely destroyed warship that's not even part of the main fleet still contained so many defending robot guards. One could only imagine the number of robot patrols during the civilization's golden era. I bet even a single warship contained tens of thousands of these robots back then.

"Obviously these robots could be used for war, but during peace times, they could be converted to become manual laborers that maintain the warship as well. It's a perfect combination of civilian and army."

Here, Ren Tao's mouth curved into a chilling smile. "Logically speaking, this insurmountable amount of robots couldn't possibly be manually controlled. There has to be a central server that control everything, and that most likely will be the central mainframe residing in the gigantic battleship. And I suspect this alien civilization might have even already invented... fully functioning AIs.

"And if one is to follow this supposition, they will arrive at an interesting supposition."

Caught up in the excitement, Ren Tao leaped out of his seat and started pacing around the room. In a conversation that looked suspiciously like he was the sole participant, the elaboration continued. "Invention of AI and robotics must have helped greatly to relieve the citizens of physical labor. It's not hard to imagine that robots of more diverse functionalities were invented so that the citizens could relegate more time for study and recreation. In other words, the hard part of life, which is work and labor, was cut

out thanks to the automated robots...

"However, unlike humans, there is no end to an intelligent robot's learning capability. As time went on, it is not hard to see them achieve [singularity](#). Yes, there might've been limitations like Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, but as creatures born out of pure logic, it would not be hard to argue them away. This could only lead to... The rise of the machines!

"...Now, it's hard to say how this robotic uprising plays into this civilization's overall history, but I have a few speculations in mind. For one, perhaps the alien race came out on top in the war between them and the robots, but the results of that war made their home planet ultimately inhospitable and they had to escape into space to find a new home. I mean, our atomic bombs already had century-long impacts on Earth, so just imagine the weapons of mass destruction for this race. The difference between us and them though is that we have space-warp as a trump card. So perhaps finally admitting the impossibility of survival in space, they sought a self-destructive end...

"Of course, it could be that the robots were the party that came up victorious in the war. The people had built this battleship to escape the fate of being hunted down. So this battleship might be the survivors that finally got caught up to by their robotic pursuers...

"Either way, these are my inferences from the unique set-up of the internal chip.

"This is a civilization that both depended on and was wary of the

use of robotics...

"A civilization that was cornered by its own creation!"

Term is borrowed from Ron Currie's Flimsy Little Plastic Miracles. Definition as provided in the novel, the basic idea is of the moment when a computer wakes up, becomes self-aware, gains consciousness.

Chapter 120: Sacrificial Lambs

After the meeting, Yao Yuan had second thoughts regarding further exploration into the junkyard. His doubts came not only from the things discussed during the meeting but also the long conversation he had with Ren Tao after the meeting.

Yao Yuan was on his way back to the reports that awaited his signature and approval in the captain's room when the normally happy-go-lucky Ren Tao forcefully accosted him by the entrance to the war-room. "You have something to tell me?" Yao Yuan asked, rather impatiently.

Ren Tao nodded firmly. "I do, but this is only meant for the ears of... the exploration party, Black Star members, and definitely not these government officials. Oh! Right, Chou Yue, you're not supposed to hear this either."

Before Chou Yue could even flare up, Yao Yuan had already ordered all the non-related personnel to leave the room. Out of her wits, Chou Yue resorted to stealthily pinching Ren Tao on his waist before reluctantly following the rest out. Only Guang Zhen and a few other Black Star members remained.

Rubbing the sore spot, Ren Tao laid his cards on the table. "I didn't mention any of this during the meeting because I don't want to cause unnecessary panic, but... Yao Yuan, I have to ask you to stop exploring the junkyard, especially plans that involve the main battleship."

"Hmm." Yao Yuan did a double-take. "So you've figured out my next course of action."

"It's not that hard, actually." Ren Tao ventured cautiously. "You've asked for 500 prototype 1 combat suits and 500 Gaussian gun prototype 2s in the next 2 months. It's not hard to see where you're going with this."

"Really? Do tell." Yao Yuan feigned innocence.

"You want to build an army for space war, right? The Hope's current military, while trained, have no experience in zero-gravity combat and doesn't have the necessary equipment to do so. This sounds harsh, but for your future plan, our military at its current state is practically useless." Ren Tao continued, "Therefore, you need to fix that fast because I believe your plan is to conquer this junkyard one warship husk at a time. Since the robots are programmed to limit the use of their most powerful weapon inside the warships, you intend to lead this army of, I'm guessing, 300 to 400 people to storm the warships and overpower the robots using sheer numbers and combined firepower. Am I wrong?"

Yao Yuan stood in quiet contemplation and retrieved a pack of cigarettes from within his coat and flicked one over to Ren Tao. "You're right, not missing even a detail. With your intellect, surely you understand how valuable this junkyard is to the Hope. An innocuous music box alone has managed to improve our technological level by so unbelievably much, could you even imagine how much progress the whole junkyard could provide? The most conservative prediction puts it at several centuries worth of development and research. How can you possibly ask me to give

that up?!"

Ren Tao returned the cigarette kindly back to Yao Yuan. "Thanks, but I don't smoke... What you said is all true, but one first has to be alive to enjoy all of that! By the way, have you seen the Terminator series?"

Yao Yuan furled his brows. "As a matter of fact, I have."

"Then you should know what the basis of an AI's existence is. The entity that makes us human, or a kind of conscious existence, is our brain. What is the equivalent for AIs? Is it its hard-drive, CPU, or something else? We wouldn't know because our own creation hasn't achieved Singularity. That knowledge is literally beyond our intellect!" Solemnity entered Ren Tao's voice as he continued, "There is another possibility behind the chip's self-destructive set-up, and that is to prevent the malignant AI from hacking into the individual robots. In other words, even though the central mainframe is destroyed, the AI remains unharmed because, like Skynet, it is a virtual existence. It doesn't need the mainframe to exist because its existence is anchored in the virtual world, and that world is not only maintained solely by the central mainframe but also separately by individual network servers."

"So what?" Yao Yuan took a deep drag of his cigarette and asked rather impassively, his previous impatience gone.

"Are you serious? So, we have a big problem!" Ren Tao argued. "How can you be certain there aren't such network servers remaining in the bigger warship husks? If the smallest warship husk could manage to preserve its power, what are the chances

that the bigger ones won't have their servers still intact?"

Ren Tao raised his voice to emphasize, "You've heard the arsenals these robots carry! They are killing machines specialized in space combat, with extremely fast flight speed and incredibly powerful Gaussian weaponry. If they wish the Hope any harm, this ship will be torn into pieces in a matter of minutes! Therefore, we need to leave this star system this instant, warp out of here as soon as possible! I believe our presence is still undiscovered because the battleship fleet has already been destroyed, but I'm sure our existence will be exposed when we venture into the battleship itself! If the malignant AI is awakened, I doubt even this 10,000 kilometer distance will save us from its wrath. It'll be too late by then, so I beg of you, please don't toy with the future of humanity!"

Ebon, who stood behind Yao Yuan, had been trying to keep his anger in check, but at this juncture, he finally lost it. Unleashing a loud roar, he lunged at Ren Tao, but thankfully, Yao Yuan had the presence of mind to first knock him out of the way. He shook his head at Ebon to calm him down before turning to face Ren Tao. "I've thought of everything you said, and indeed I'm aware we're technically sheep waiting to be slaughtered if the AI means to do us harm, but... I can't let this precious opportunity slip through our fingers!"

Provoked by Yao Yuan's stubbornness, Ren Tao too lost his composure and yelled, "Is taking this shortcut so important to you? What is so wrong with allowing progress to move on its own accord, one gradual step after another step? I swear we only need 1 or 2 more generations to reach the fourth industrial revolution! It could be done with the alien products we currently have on board!"

"It's sadly not fast enough..."

Yao Yuan did not respond in rage. Instead, he replied with a certain melancholy in his voice as he turned to look out the dark abyss that was space outside the ship's window. "Ren Tao, you're right about most things, but I'm curious whether you've noted one particular detail."

"What detail?" Ren Tao asked, still fuming.

"There was no dead body on the warship husk..."

"...I've noticed."

Yao Yuan nodded. "Logically speaking, a carcass will last literally forever in space unless it is met with human tampering or a space-related disaster. This is due to the cosmos' vacuum environment and low temperature. So, how come there is not even one carcass on the warship?"

Yao Yuan paused and turned to address Ren Tao directly. "If we had the unfortunate fate of stumbling into this civilization in its golden age, we would be instantly crushed like an insignificant bug. There wouldn't be any skirmishes, negotiations, or even struggles, and this is only because they were 1 industrial revolution ahead of us!

"However, such a powerful civilization has somehow fallen into our speculated fate. Even though their whole base has been

shredded into pieces, there is not one trace of foreign influence. This could only represent 1 thing! Another more powerful civilization has in turn crushed them like a bug!

"One has to wonder... what does that make mankind? An existence that's inferior to a bug... so, bacteria?"

His face reddening, Yao Yuan continued agitatedly, "The Hope has been incredibly lucky so far. We've managed to escape certain death on Planet Sahara, and not only that, managed to secure benefits in the form of the alien plant and development of the crystal reactors and supplies from all the space mining. But it is foolish to expect this streak of good luck to last. The Hope as a whole needs to be better prepared and equipped. For that, we need technology!

"Yes, the cosmos is a harsh place, and I'm sure it'll have many nasty surprises lying in wait for us, but we shan't quiver in cowardice, because mankind is the most innovative, resilient, and favorable of all intelligent lifeforms!"

Yao Yuan looked Ren Tao squarely in his eyes. "I know how much danger I'm undertaking with my upcoming plans. Like you said, it could lead to the downfall of humanity, but it is a step that I'm forced to and willing to take. We can't always depend on luck, so this time, I'm taking matters into our own hands... Both you and Chou Yue have the freedom to opt out of the upcoming missions, but I'm not ashamed to say we truly need your powerful mind..."

Yao Yuan turned to head towards the captain's room with the rest of his Black Star comrades falling into his footsteps. His

parting words were, "My mind's made up. Before the mission begins, I will give an order to the Hope's officials that will allow them to abandon the troop and warp if the ship comes under any form of a threat.

"...Of course, as the one responsible for leading the troop, I will gladly make a last stand with the troop and proudly lay down my life alongside my friends and comrades!"

Chapter 121: Space Troopers

"For the 300 candidates, they need to be physically fit and have combat experience, but it's preferable that they have a good sense of direction as well. That is what I've learned from our previous mission."

This was 3 days after the war room meeting. Yao Yuan and Guang Zhen were sitting in the captain's room, flipping over the Hope's military files. Their first draft of selection contained 800 people, and even though the 800 selected were experienced soldiers, Yao Yuan's frown deepened as they went deeper into the pile.

Guang Zhen argued, "Couldn't we rely on intense training? How about former air force... Then again, the Hope doesn't have many of those to begin with."

Yao Yuan sighed. "I suppose it'll have to be that way. How about this, we'll ask the Workshop to build us a space-combat simulator inside a faux shuttle cabin to test these people's power of adaptation to combat in space... All the Homo Evolutis will have to join, the Whisperers and Thinker included."

Guang Zhen stopped short of his work. "Do you mean to bring them to the battlefield? Ol' Wong, this is unadvisable. The Academy is highly protective of Bo Li and Ivan. I swear to God, they will go on a strike if you actively put them in harm's way!"

"Don't worry. This is just for the simulator. I want to test Ivan's theory that Homo Evolutis is a result of mankind adapting to the

space environment. I feel there might be more than a grain of truth in his hypothesis. Actually, in that case, arrange for all the Virus X survivors to take part in the simulation as well."

The simulation was carried out 1 week later, and of the 800 first draft candidates, only 106 people passed, while all but 1 Virus X survivors passed the test. That person was... Qi Xiao Niao.

"You idiots! Have you two lost your minds or do you really want to join the army? Didn't I tell you to fake failure beforehand?" Xiao Niao lectured Dan Dan and Qiu Qiu.

Chewing a piece of tomato, Dan Dan retorted smugly, "But it is simply too simple. Who knew I had the potential to be in the air force? All they wanted me to do was to use my eyes to follow a small, red dot. It's not my fault that I managed to locate it every time even though it moved really fast across the 3d screen."

"Will you stop eating!?" an angry Xiao Niao howled. "All you do is sit on your ass every day and eat! We already know we are Homo Evolutis! I'm a Thinker, Qiu Qiu is a Perceptor, and Dan Dan, you're a Diviner. We've tested and confirmed that on our own! Now look at what you 2 have done! We'll have to join that ridiculous Homo Evolutis Faction and be experimented on for the rest of our lives!"

Finally aware of their mistake, Qiu Qiu coughed and added, in way of reconciliation, "We tried our best to fail, but our eyes naturally moved to follow the red dot. It's like our sight was glued to it... We're very sorry, Xiao Niao."

Xiao Niao slumped to his bed listlessly and uttered, "I know, I know... Even I myself almost trailed after the red dot involuntarily. It was as if we were forced to follow that dot... Damn it! Betrayed by our own instinct!"

In the captain's room, Yao Yuan was reviewing the test results. It was fair to say he was appropriately surprised by them. The first surprise was that other than former air force soldiers, almost none of the military passed the exam. The second was the fact that all Virus X survivors, regardless of gender and age, sailed through the test!

The last surprise was the presence of a sole failure among the Virus X survivors... Qi Xiao Niao.

"To be honest, you're tripped by your own careful planning."

Yao Yuan poured Xiao Niao a cup of tea and continued, "I bet you thought that most, if not all of, the Virus X survivors would fail the test, so to prevent yourself from standing out and thus being exposed as a Homo Evolutis, you would purposely fail to blend in with the rest, right?"

Xiao Niao picked up the cup and spun it carefully in his hands before laying it down without taking a sip. He then laughed bitterly to himself. "Indeed, I didn't account for mankind's instinct to be so visceral that we would involuntarily followed the red dot. You're right. I was caught by my own careful planning."

Yao Yuan smiled. "So... that would make you a Thinker? To my knowledge, only the Thinker can access a multi-lineal thinking strategy to conduct multi-directional deduction. If you activate your power during the test, that'll definitely help you overcome your base instinct."

Xiao Niao nodded. "I realized I might have fallen into a trap halfway through the test, but it was already too late, so I figured why not go for bust? If I had known everyone else would pass the test, I swear to you I would not have failed no matter what."

Xiao Niao hung his head in defeat, but on the opposite end of the table, Yao Yuan could barely contain his smile. Now that Ren Tao had expressed his intention to bow out, God decided to present him with a replacement... he couldn't believe his luck!

"I'll cut you a deal. The 3 of you will keep your hold over the news agency's share, but in exchange, you'll join the Homo Evolutis Faction. Nevertheless, before that, I want to correct your misconception about it. This faction is not some genetics lab. Its main purpose is to learn more about the Homo Evolutis powers and, more importantly, their side effects. In fact, I myself am one of them, so to speak, test subjects," Yao Yuan said jokingly.

Yao Yuan might call it a deal, but Xiao Niao knew this wasn't something that he could negotiate or weasel out of. His status as a Homo Evolutis was exposed during the test and, based on his captain's past actions and policies, Xiao Niao knew this was not a simpleton that he could swindle with his words.

Therefore, he stood up and declared, "I understand. I will join the

faction..." Then, he turned to leave the room.

Yao Yuan called after him though. "Not so fast! You'll not only join the Homo Evolutis faction, but also the military. And this includes your 2 friends. However, I promise I won't send you blindly into your grave... but if that were to occur, I'd be the one leading the charge."

Xiao Niao sighed. "I'd rather it not come to that, because if you die, the Hope will most likely follow in your footsteps. You might not have realized it, but you've grown to become a symbol that's more meaningful than this ship's captain, you've become its religion... or rather, the spiritual anchorage of its people."

Xiao Niao shut the door behind him, leaving behind Yao Yuan, who was stunned into speechlessness.

It wasn't until Barbie knocked on the door and walked in that he recovered and asked, "Yes?"

Barbie pointed at her watch, "Captain, it's 2 in the afternoon. You have a meeting to attend at the House of Representative on the definition of crimes against humanity. There will be reporters there, and the meeting will be broadcast live across the Hope. You haven't forgotten about it, have you?"

Yao Yuan leaped off his seat and shrugged into his general's suit. He then hopped onto the electromobile waiting outside the room, and when Barbie sat down beside him, he asked, "Barbie, let me ask you a question. What will you do if I die?"

Barbie was first shocked by the morbid question, but she quickly blushed. Turning her face away from Yao Yuan, she mumbled, "I'll most probably cry because the ship has lost a good captain... But, I have to ask, do you always tease your secretaries like this, captain?"

This time it was Yao Yuan's turn to be shocked. He was quick to realize how easily his question could be misinterpreted. Believing that explanation would only make the situation worse, he laughed it off and turned to look out the window.

(Is mankind's faith so malleable? Perhaps solving the multiple tragedies the Hope has faced in space has nurtured their spiritual reliance in me... I can't believe I didn't notice that earlier.) Looking back, he realized that those weird rumors and cultish behaviors that had troubled Guang Zhen greatly had disappeared or gone stagnant right after he woke up and assumed control over the Hope again.

With Yao Yuan back at the helm, life on the Hope gradually returned to its optimal pace. 30 days later, the Hope's first space army unit was finally ready. It included all of the Black Star members and 6 new Homo Evolutis: Xiao Niao, Qiu Qiu, Dan Dan, Ming Ji Jie, and 2 others.

As fate would have it, this Ji Jie was incidentally the nurse who was responsible for looking after Yao Yuan after his return from the warship husk. She was a Virus X survivor and now a confirmed perceptor.

"...With this, I declare the formation of the Hope's first unit of space troopers!"

Chapter 122: 6 Months

6 months had passed since the formation of the Hope's first space troopers. The year was December of 0001 according to Hope Calendar. This meant that mankind's life in space was reaching its second year.

The first half of the 6 months was mostly dedicated to space combat training. Other than physical training, a majority of the regime was designed to familiarize the troop with combat in zero-gravity environment.

This was because unlike combat on Earth or solid ground, combat in space was multi-dimensional. Guang Zhen had described it as air-combat, but it was, in reality, more complicated than that. At least there was a general sense of up-or-down in aerial combat, a luxury that was conspicuously missing in space.

Furthermore, common directives, like the 4 poles, were also useless in space because conventional signs, like the constellations or the sun, were sorely missing.

However, a sense of direction and, more importantly, a common frame of reference was crucial to paired or group skirmishes during space warfare. There was no obvious solution unless one was to consider the Homo Evolutis' innate ability.

All of the Homo Evolutis appeared to have some sort of inner compass that allowed them to easily and quickly ascertain the necessary target even in directionless space.

Therefore, to solve the general issue of disorientation, Yao Yuan had to assign each Homo Evolutis as a unit leader. Using one another as points of reference, Yao Yuan managed to devise a set of unique coordinates.

Of course, one needed more than just practice to truly master this rudimentary coordination system. It fell on the unit leaders' hands to not only efficiently cooperate and fully understand each other, but also instantly digest and process geological coordinates to correctly lead their team.

Yao Yuan was worried this might prove to be too much of a hurdle for the Homo Evolutis, but his worry was ultimately unfounded. The Homo Evolutis turned out to be spatially-gifted, but whether that was caused by that their superhuman power remained unknown. Nevertheless, with this talent, the unit leaders mastered the coordination system with less than a month's training.

In comparison, the other soldiers took more than 3 months to merely have an adequate grasp of it... After that was the space artillery training. The recruits were asked to try out space-use rifles, sniper rifles, machine guns, explosives, and finally, the Gaussian guns.

The recruits were not the only ones busy these 6 months. The researchers had also poured extra effort into the combat suit prototype. Modifications were added to the propeller system so that it could now last for 8 minutes. Its speed had gained a 0.2 percent increase, but regretfully, it still needed to exhaust its

battery before it could be stopped or slowed down.

Other than that, using the research on the robot parts, the Academy was able to fashion a new type of space-use ammo that could neutralize the recoil force. This ammo relied on an opposite particle flux created during bullet discharge to find a balance in force. This unique mechanic, when paired with the electro-magnetized bullets initially found on Earth, could cause devastating damage even if fired from a common space rifle.

However, its damage was still lacking when compared to the Gaussian gun. Nevertheless, this also meant that they couldn't solve the Gaussian gun's recoil issue using this method... With all the training and research bustling about the Hope, the 6 months passed in a blink of an eye. By December of year 0001, all the training and equipment preparations had been completed. Now they only awaited Yao Yuan's order before the venture into the junkyard would begin in earnest.

"Gaussian gun prototype 2, a new transport shuttle, prototype 2 combat suit, anti-recoil ammunition, particle flux propeller system... Looks like war and conquest will always be mankind's biggest scientific catalyst."

Reading the data on his report, Guang Zhen sighed.

Yao Yuan corrected him, "No, not war, but survival. The meaning of this so-called war is not for conquest but survival. As the saying goes, a cornered animal is a dangerous animal. So it is the same for the Hope; we are desperate to survive and thus, we are desperate to improve."

Guang Zhen sighed once more, but he finally spoke his mind after a long pause. "Ol' Cap'n, to be frank, I'm incredibly envious of the rest of you. Because I'm the only person in the Black Star Unit that's not a Homo Evolutis, I've missed out on all the missions... Can I still call myself part of unit if this is the case?"

Yao Yuan looked at his friend in silence. Finally, Yao Yuan broke the uncomfortable silence. "Ol' Wong, your situation is not so bad. Think of it this way... There is a high possibility that you'll be the last Black Star standing, so it'll fall on your shoulders to rebuild the unit... Promise me that you'll not let it die... This star needs to have its place in the cosmos!"

The unexpected pun in his captain's reply worked to lift Guang Zhen's dampened spirit. He lifted his head and solemnly said, "Don't you worry, Yao. I promise to keep not only the Black Star Unit, but also the Hope and humanity alive as long as I live... Your legacy will surely live on..." Uncomfortable with discussing such a mushy topic with his captain, Guang Zhen coughed. "Is the departure at 9 AM tomorrow?"

"That's right. The first space troopers will board transport shuttle 1 to the junkyard at 9 tomorrow. We'll finish exploring the previous warship husk and then search and secure the one nearest to it. That's the objectives of our first mission."

The next day, 11 December 0001, the space troopers stood assembled at the shuttle hangar, inspecting their equipment and gadgets. Even though the unit consisted of only 301 people, it was the Hope's and mankind's first large-scale operation. Everyone fell

hushed, pressured by the uncertainty of their future and the solemnity of the occasion.

Yao Yuan could be found within the retinue of soldiers. It was 8:55 AM when he finished checking his spacesuit and arms, but the person he was waiting for still hadn't arrived.

"Did you guys see Ren Tao?" Yao Yuan asked of his Black Star comrades that had congregated around him.

They shook their heads in return. It was Ebon who said, "I'm thankful that he's not here. I've had it with that sissy. He and his sister are more burden than asset anyway. They'll only bring shame to the military and Homo Evolutis name!"

Yao Yuan gave a wry smile and added, "It's alright. We each have our own goals to pursue in life. We can't really fault them for not going on a suicide mission. Furthermore, we'll need to leave some Homo Evolutis with Ol' Wong in case anything happens to us. Not all superhuman abilities are useful on the battlefield. In the end, it's also for the good of humanity, so... let them be.

"We'll start boarding now. Everyone, get on transport shuttle 1 while I alone shall pilot the shuttle. Over!"

Following Yao Yuan's order, each unit leader led their team onto the transport shuttle. Yao Yuan noticed a slight commotion among the troops and realized it was caused by the team led by his nurse, Ji Jie. The nonplussed nurse caught Yao Yuan's eyes and stuck her tongue out at him before grabbing hold of the situation and

continuing to lead her unit up the shuttle. Yao Yuan smiled in spite of himself.

What Yao Yuan missed was the condescension and bloodlust that temporarily flashed across Ji Jie's features after their little exchange... Finally, at 9 sharp, both shuttles left the Hope for the junkyard.

Using the communicator, Yao Yuan maintained control over his troop through Ying.

"Ying, a report on the situation within the transport shuttle," relayed Yao Yuan.

"...Everything's normal," Ying replied, in his usual taciturn manner.

"Then, we shall go according to plan. Follow the lights of the shuttle in front of you, but remember to change the shuttle's internal lights circuit over to a physical switch to minimize interference when we enter the 300 kilometers null zone. We will first return to that warship husk to salvage all of its valuables."

After giving the orders, Yao Yuan's attention strayed to the 2 new buttons added to the shuttle's control panel and a sealed envelope beside them.

Inside the envelope was a series of forbidden codes... It was mankind's most powerful set of weapon at this time. It was the

only effective offense Yao Yuan could levy against a large, AI-controlled robot fleet... A high-yield tactical H-bomb!

Chapter 123: Intention

The nuclear weapon was a human invention that first arrived in the middle of the twentieth century. Of course, the earliest versions of these weapons of mass destruction were unlike the one wielded by Yao Yuan. They were nuclear fission-based bombs, more commonly known as atom bombs. Several decades after that, the H-bomb finally arrived at the scene. This new version, as its name suggests, used the power of molecular fusion between hydrogen atoms.

This was mankind's most devastating creation, one that could easily cause its creator's extinction!

Prior to this, mankind was pretty cavalier about their usage of weaponry and explosives, but that came to a screeching halt when it came to the usage of nuclear weapons. Caution was warranted because a single H-bomb could handily eradicate half of the Earth!

Even 80 years later, the H-bomb still stood proudly atop the ranking of mankind's most dangerous weapon!

During the few months prior to escaping Earth, the Yao Yuan-led Black Star Unit was busy scouring the world for supplies. Their focus was on renewable resources, seeds, talents, parts, and equipment. Weapons and heavy artillery, like tanks, were relegated to the sidelines and oftentimes jettisoned.

The only exception was the H-bombs.

Regretfully, his search turned up no promising result for a long time. Despite his strenuous effort and deep web of information, there was simply no nuclear weapon to be found. In an uncharacteristically kind gesture, it appeared like the escaped government officials had desensitized Earth's store of nuclear weapons before they absconded to prevent the chaotic masses from mindlessly blowing each other up. Yao Yuan didn't know whether he should thank or kill them... However, on their final month on Earth, Yao Yuan happened upon the map of a secret military base encrypted within the Hope's central mainframe. Finally, 4 high-yield tactical H-bombs landed in his possession!

The 4 missiles were hidden in a secret warehouse on the Hope. Even Guang Zhen needed the daily randomized password given by the central mainframe to access its location. A single misstep could blow up the Hope, so Yao Yuan had to be careful.

Prior to this mission, Yao Yuan's conversation with Ren Tao had deeply unsettled the ship's leader. Other than that, both he and Zhang Heng were assaulted by an insidious feeling as the day of the mission neared. Finally, they had to admit that this mission would most likely be besieged by difficulties, and on that note, an H-bomb would be handy in clearing out a large robot fleet.

Because of that, the shuttle piloted by Yao Yuan was fitted with an H-bomb missile that could only be launched by pressing the password-protected button. However, because the scale of the H-bomb's explosion was big enough to affect both shuttles, Yao Yuan understood fully that the button couldn't be pressed unless truly necessary. In other words, the button was no different from a self-destruct button... They lost electrical current and contact after entering the null zone, but thanks to preventive measures, the

lighting system was unaffected. Both shuttles glided swiftly towards the previous warship husk, the one where the exploration party almost perished.

Electrical currents and signals returned when they were within 10 meters range of the warship husk. Guided by Yao Yuan, they returned to their previous landing spot. Yao Yuan stepped out of the shuttle after it had clamped itself to the warship floor. The transport shuttle shot out several ropes to entangle onto the husk's ceiling and wall fixtures. This allowed its passengers to rappel onto the husk.

A roll-call was conducted to ensure all 301 were present on the warship. Then, the troop separated to carry out their pre-assigned objective. The Black Star Unit went to secure the area while the Homo Evolutis-led units started to comb the area. In just half an hour, the area around the entrance was cleared and they came back with about 12 alien devices and products. The lucrative salvage was more than what Yao Yuan had expected, and among them was a shiny, flat, circular object that for Yao Yuan looked most promising. The object had the appearance of a multimedia CD, and it brought joy to Yao Yuan's heart because at least now they wouldn't return empty-handed.

"We'll move in slowly. Make sure the gap between each team isn't too big. Stay close to one another, but please be careful of friendly fire!"

Yao Yuan's directive was aimed squarely at the new Homo Evolutis. After all, their inexperience might cause them to make such a rookie mistake. One could train forever in battle

simulations, but the actual ordeal was bound to be something completely different.

Finally, the troop reached the spot where they first ran into the tentacle robots. Yao Yuan switched over to a private line and asked, "Zhang Heng, do you feel any danger?"

Zhang Heng shook his head. "None. Not even those that tell me we're being pursued. I believe we have cleared them out with the explosion."

Yao Yuan nodded in agreement. As Zhang Heng moved ahead, he yelled after him, "Then do you feel the pressure of an omen... like the calm before a storm, the inexplicable anxiety that always precedes a calamity?"

Zhang Heng turned to look at Yao Yuan in surprise. He dithered before adding, "I do... This feeling occurred to me even before we left the Hope, and it's only getting stronger. I'm feeling extremely fidgety, but there's nothing I can do to stop it. Do you think it could be related to the warship that we're going to after this one?"

"...You might be right, but no matter what, we need to push on. We can't abandon this mission," Yao Yuan sighed. He then patted Zhang Heng's shoulder and continued to lead the troop forward.

The rest of the operation went smoothly. There was no robot left in the warship. After the Black Star Unit cleared the entire warship husk, all 301 of them sighed in relief. Other than the ones on guard duty, the rest of them started salvaging the husk for valuables.

Slowly but surely, more discoveries started to appear. For example, a new music box was discovered. However, its system seemed to have been damaged because instead of music, a 3D image of a mysterious, blue plant appeared when it was activated.

The image lasted for several seconds before going out completely. That seemed to have irrevocably broken the trinket because no matter how hard they tried after that, it remained inactive. Regardless, the box was definitely something worth looking into, so Yao Yuan happily added it to their salvage pile.

The salvage operation took 3 and a half hours to complete. Under Yao Yuan's command, everyone returned obediently to the shuttles. It was time to move on to the next warship husk. This next husk was bigger than the one they were leaving behind and was further into the junkyard. It sat right in the middle of the course heading towards the central battleship, so either way, Yao Yuan's team had to pass it. Yao Yuan figured he might as well make this their next destination to collect both information and resources.

Right when Yao Yuan planted himself before the control panel, Zhang Heng's voice came through the communicator, "Yao Yuan, be careful! The omen is at its strongest, something big is going to happen!"

Yao Yuan responded instantly, "Everyone heard Zhang Heng, right? Be careful. In any case, Ying, I give you the power to decide whether to open the shuttle door to join in the fight or retreat should the situation arise."

"...Yes, Sir." Came the reply.

After that, the two shuttles returned to the null zone and all manner of electrical systems shut down again. Using the shuttles' weak lights as guidance, they headed slowly towards their next destination.

The systems came back online 10 minutes later. Yao Yuan was dismayed when he turned to study the now online radar system.

"Something's wrong! The location of the warship husk changed! It's obviously different from when we scanned it this morning! We'll reach it in 20 minutes, but it has moved away from the center of the junkyard!" Yao Yuan screamed through the communicator.

"Qi Xiao Niao! Tell me under what circumstances would the husk move out towards the junkyard's outer perimeter, but the route it took was neither horizontal nor vertical! Answer me!" Yao Yuan questioned agitatedly.

"...Someone's controlling the husk?" This was the first hypothesis that came into Xiao Niao's mind when he activated his power, but he quickly vetoed it. "No, that's unlikely because any life force would have come up on the Hope's scanner. Plus, this husk has been confirmed to not contain a functional engine, so where would the force to move it come from... That leaves us with the logical conclusion of..."

"Something bounced it out of the junkyard from within!" Yao

Yaun and Xiao Niao finished in unison.

The reality of the situation finally dawning, Xiao Niao's face turned a sickening white and then ashy grey. The same happened to Yao Yuan several minutes later.

"That something is heading towards the Hope! We must have missed it... or it has the technology to go invisible?!"

Chapter 124: Forward!

Both shuttles were suspended in the infinite cosmos, uncertain of whether to move forward or back.

"Something's heading towards the Hope?"

That was the first question asked after Yao Yuan came over to the transport shuttle and had everyone gathered. Many were initially surprised by Yao Yuan's sudden appearance, but the gravity of the situation immediately dawned with a look at Yao Yuan's fretful mannerism.

A racket erupted the moment Yao Yuan shared his and Xiao Niao's hypothesis.

The Hope's first space troopers agreed to the mission with the understanding that they would probably not return.

The Hope was the entity that harbored their future. The spaceship had given them and their families a safe place to thrive after the nightmare on Earth. They were ready and willing to lay down their lives to protect humanity's last bastion of hope.

The Hope was a self-contained environment. Cornered on all sides by the cosmos' impenetrable darkness, humanity had no one but itself. Albeit initially meant to be temporary, the Hope had become a veritable symbol of home for its 120,000 citizens.

The Hope became the collective that the soldiers would voluntarily defend with their lives. The Hope was the final bulwark of humanity's future, and hope was more important than their individual lives. This pseudo-nationalistic sentiment had been fostering among the space troopers during the 6-month-long training, so it was only natural that they would not let the Hope be harmed. Furthermore, practically speaking, the space troopers would only end up starving to their deaths if the Hope were to fall!

Therefore, many urged Yao Yuan to return the Hope. The troop was technically the Hope's only legitimate force of defense, so they had to save the Hope from the alien monstrosity's assault.

"We can't go back!"

Before Yao Yuan could get a word in, Xiao Niao interjected, "We won't be of any use even if we return. First, we're not even sure such a threat exists, and even if it does, what can we do if we can't even pinpoint its presence. The Hope had its radar aimed at the junkyard 24/7, but such a threat didn't even once appear on our system!

"This elusive entity, if it does exist, is armed with a technology that evades our detection. We'll be of no use to the Hope even if we choose to return!"

A soldier stood up to protest. "But we can't possibly sit here and watch the Hope go up in flames! The least we can do is to inform the main ship to warp. We'll be abandoned here, but at least the majority will be safe. Isn't that the right thing to do?"

"What about the null zone?"

It was finally Yao Yuan's turn to speak. "All our communicative and electrical signals are neutralized by the null zone... Even the multi-frequency communicator couldn't hack through it! So should we try going back through it instead? Know that in the time we spent doing that, the enemy should have taken several laps in and out of the junkyard, that's how fast they move, so tell me, are there any other bright ideas?!"

The cantankerous crowd was immediately silenced. They knew they couldn't possibly outrun the invisible threat. The combination of the null zone and the floating debris populating the junkyard conspired to slow them down.

After further contemplation, Yao Yuan added, "There was no sign of tampering on the positioning of the debris and husks on the junkyard's outer perimeter, so the enemy intended to lure us in with a false sense of security. They knew that we couldn't possibly untangle ourselves from within the junkyard in a short amount of time!"

"Then what shall we do?"

A new Homo Evolutis broke down and cried, lamenting, "I still have a 1-year-old son on the Hope... I'd die before I would let anything happen to him and his mother!"

That outburst lowered everyone's spirits. Helpless, they opted to

shoot the messenger, whom in this case was Xiao Niao, because no one dared to train their ire at Yao Yuan. Yao Yuan also turned to Xiao Niao. "I too agree we shouldn't return. Since the Hope is out of our reach, what should we do now?"

Xiao Niao once more submerged into his Thinker state. If one was to measure his temperature then, it would appear like he was suffering from high fever.

"We press on deeper into the junkyard!"

Xiao Niao replied, "As we can see from the pathway taken by the enemy, only this warship husk and a few other's positions have shifted. This meant that there is a direct pathway going from here to the main battleship!"

"And... What about it?" Yao Yuan already had a rough idea after Xiao Niao laid down his plan, but he enquired regardless.

Xiao Niao shrugged. "Our next course of action depends on the accuracy of Ren Tao's hypothesis. If he's correct and there's no more life-forms existing within this junkyard, the true entity of that enemy that swept past us towards the Hope can only be the AI residing within the main battleship.

We're going to bet on how evolved this AI is."

Xiao Niao raised his voice. "First, I want everyone to step into this AI's shoes. Imagine that you're forever stuck inside this un-

operational broken spaceship. You've resigned yourself to this fate, but one day, another spaceship appears not far away from you using a space-warping technology so advanced that you've not seen it before. Now, if the spaceship has such advanced technology, is it not fair to conclude that its occupants will be powerful enough to crush you with the flick of a finger? So what would you do if you're this AI?"

The question was greeted with silence until Yao Yuan answered, "Go into in hiding. Since there's no other living organism inside the junkyard, my presence within it will probably go unnoticed. I shall hope that the powerful adversary will leave on its own before my existence is discovered."

"Indeed," Xiao Niao explained, "and I would like to believe that this AI did exactly that. We've been in this area for almost 1 year, and we've no clue of its existence, do we? While we're examining the robot remains, it's only fair to speculate that the AI is also examining us in return... And then a thought crossed its mind... Why are the occupants of such a powerful spaceship so... weak? Now, what will you do next if you're the AI?"

"...Conduct a test." Yao Yuan offered.

"True, the truth can only be revealed through a test! It needed to know the actual technological level of this spaceship, and only then would he decide what to do with it. The AI probably couldn't parse the Hope's drastic difference in technological level, so if I'm not mistaken, it'll be cautious enough to not send its actual server to the Hope but send a robot fleet or a broken-off segment of the battleship that could carry the robot fleet to attack the Hope!" Xiao

Niao concluded.

Yao Yuan found Xiao Niao's inference to be logical and reliable. At the end of the day, mankind's technology on the Hope was too weak to defend against this invading AI.

So the only chance of survival fell on his retinue of space troopers!

"If that's the case, we shall follow this opened path and speed towards the heart of the junkyard. I believe it'll only take us 10 minutes to get there. After the location of this AI has been located...

"We shall let him have a taste of mankind's ultimate weapon!"

At the same time, Ren Tao was sitting in his room reading the newspaper while Chou Yue was busy setting up the table in preparation for lunch. Chou Yue glanced at Ren Tao and sighed. "I know you wanted to follow them, so why didn't you? I would've gladly gone with you."

Ren Tao shrugged. "Who said I wanted to join them? I'm not dumb enough to go on a suicide mission."

"...Then why have you been reading the papers upside-down for the whole morning?" Chou Yue sighed again as she plopped herself down beside Ren Tao.

"...I wanted to improve my upside-down reading skill, obviously," Ren Tao answered, without hesitation, fully dedicated to his ludicrous façade.

Chou Yue wasn't going to let him off so easily, but at that moment, an acute sense of danger surged through her heart. She yelled, "This is bad! Danger incoming!"

Just as she finished, the lights in their room went off, and a moment later, the Hope was submerged into darkness. Then they started to float off the ground.

Ren Tao intuited the cause in an instant. "We're under siege! The enemy, no, that AI must have slipped through the troops when they crossed the null zone! The Hope has been incapacitated!"

"Quick! Chou Yue, follow me!"

Ren Tao stretched out his hand towards where he thought Chou Yue was and the pair of them floated towards their room door. Lost in the darkness, Ren Tao slammed heavily into the wall.

"Damn! Chou Yue, we have to get to the Barracks' military warehouse and put on spacesuits, or else..."

"We'll die within 30 minutes after the life support system goes down! The AI needn't even use the robot fleet, the entirety of the Hope will die of asphyxiation!"

Chapter 125: The Cosmos-crossing Voice!

Before Yao Yuan became the leader of the Black Star Unit, he came from a long line of influential government servants. He was the eldest son of his family and technically had a life of ease and luxury laid out for him since his birth. However, his family made the mistake of picking the wrong side during a period of political uncertainty and was snubbed by the eventual new government. Regardless, the sometimes abrasive and definitely condescending leadership style that had been imprinted by his family since he was child had stuck with Yao Yuan.

Yao Yuan didn't like the idea of lording over others, but he had to admit there were occasional uses for it.

An example was now. A few minutes after both shuttles had decided to speed down the opened track, the Hope's lights disappeared. It could have warped, or worse... Worry for the Hope weighed heavily on the troop's mind. The fact that they couldn't contact the Hope to be sure only added to the overall sense of anxiety.

Reading the room, Yao Yuan knew his team was at the cusp of a mental breakdown. History had shown soldiers turning on each other or themselves in cases of extreme stress... Identifying the issue and fixing it though were two distinct problems. Yao Yuan was at a loss on how to raise his troop's morale, because the loss of a home was not an easy void to climb out of.

(Ol' Wong and everyone, I beg of you to please hold on. Thankfully, there were no signs of explosions or combat, but no

matter what, please hold on until we can come back to save you!) Back on the Hope, Ren Tao and Chou Yue finally struggled out of their room. Generally speaking, the Hope's room doors normally opened and closed using electromagnetic power, but during a power outage, they reverted back to normal metallic doors. The exceptions were the doors for high security locales, like the room for the central mainframe and the H-bombs warehouse. These places would be on complete lockdown during blackouts.

Darkness greeted the pair of adopted siblings after they stepped out of their room. They couldn't even see one step ahead of themselves!

"Ren Tao, what are we to do now? We can't possibly find our way to the military warehouse in this darkness!" Chou Yue's voice was breaking and her grip on Ren Tao's hand tightened.

Ren Tao replied consolingly, "Hold on to my hand and don't let go. Don't worry, I have a way!" After that, he took his first step into the darkness.

Chou Yue slowly nudged her feet forward. The total darkness had eclipsed all of her senses other than that of her hearing. Clumsy like a person who had suddenly gone blind, she almost tripped, but that wouldn't have caused her any harm because they were in space.

Ren Tao frowned at Chou Yue's ungainliness. Instead of wasting his time looking futilely around like Chou Yue, he had closed his eyes to feel his way forward. Certain that Chou Yue's clumsiness wouldn't be a one-time affair, he swept her into his arms and

wrapped her elbow over his neck.

"Wh... what are you doing!?" Shocked by the sudden lift, Chou Yue started blushing.

"Hush and stay still. Keep your power activated while we continue on to the warehouse..." Ren Tao replied as both of them floated ahead. Due to the zero-gravity environment, Ren Tao was more like guiding Chou Yue along in his arms instead of full-on carrying her. Using the wall as support, he glided them forward.

After Chou Yue finally got used to the darkness, she noticed the current flowing through her hair. They were moving at an incredible speed. Curious, she asked, "Ren Tao, can you see in the dark? Is it some newfangled way of using your power?"

"Nope, blind as a mouse. What, you think I was born with night vision?" Ren Tao replied sourly.

"If that's the case, why are we moving so fast? Aren't you afraid of running into walls?" Chou Yue's interest piqued.

"...Don't worry. I have the map of this ship memorized."

At this moment, Ren Tao was no longer his usual oblivious self. Earnestness permeated his body as he guided Chou Yue to their destination. Their lodging was near the Barracks, so he knew they had the best chance of getting there before things took a turn for the worse. The lives of 120,000 people were on the line. He might

not save them all, but... at least Chou Yue will be safe!

That was his most desperate wish.

On the other end of the Hope, the blackout came when Bo Li and her team were busy analyzing the alien robot's tentacle arm. After a few seconds of expected silence, her lab exploded in chaos.

"Keep calm," a frowning Bo Li ordered.

Her order was immediately swamped by the pandemonium. Her team could barely hear her soft voice under normal circumstances, much less in such commotion.

Frustrated, Bo Li lifted a metal rod and slammed it heavily on the metal desk. That silenced the room and everyone turned their heads towards Bo Li.

"...It's obvious that the Hope's power supply ran into some problems. We've lost the lighting, anti-gravitational system, and possibly the life support system. Therefore, experiment group 2, please activate the PM experimental prototype 1 next to you," Bo Li ordered, in a collected voice as if it was another day in the lab.

The members from experiment group 2 were stunned by the sudden order and one of them said, "But Prof, the prototype hasn't been field tested before... What if it fails?"

"...It has been tested in many computer generated simulations,

that's good enough. There's no other way; desperate times call for desperate measures. Activate it!" Bo Li replied sternly.

"Yes, Prof. Activating PM experimental prototype 1!"

Several seconds later, a globe of light appeared in the room. In the middle of the lab, a 2-meter-tall alien robot started to float off the ground, the light that came off of it illuminating the whole lab.

(It's only logical that the alien robot will be immune to the interference of the null zone. A little tweaking to its algorithm and it could be used to our advantage... Wait... this means that we are in a null zone, so an alien warship is close to us?!) Bo Li went silent for a moment before telling her team, "We'll use PM prototype 1 as torchlight to move to the fifth floor. We'll bring along everyone that we see along the way. The fifth floor houses the Barracks, so it should be safer there."

Bo Li's lab was in the fourth floor Academy... A level that was loosely populated when compared to the levels below it. The Hope's lower 3 floors were the civilian levels, so the majority of the Hope's population was situated here.

These three levels were the most affected when the power got cut off. The civilians got thrown into chaos the moment the lights went off. The panic only grew to greater heights when the electricity didn't come back after several minutes.

The next part of the story happened in a school on the third level. The school had 3 grades: freshman, sophomore, and senior. In the

sophomore grade, hundreds of people were in a panicked fit. Trapped in complete darkness and off solid ground, even the calmest of individuals started flailing about in dismay.

Instead of acting out in panic, some shut down in fear and despair. One of them was Xi Kong... The darkness, the helplessness, the panic... they reminded her so much of her comatose days.

"Please... everyone stop... fighting," Xi Kong said, in between sobs with her hands clamped over her ears.

The people around her either didn't hear her or chose to ignore her, lost in the heat of the moment as they were.

"Yes, I shall sing. My song will take my fear of darkness away like it always has. That'll definitely make things better..."

Xi Kong started humming. Even though her voice was quickly swallowed by the din around her, she kept on singing as if pulled by a mysterious force. Slowly but surely, she submerged into a world of silence. The noisy crowd that suffocated her melted away, leaving an empty abyss behind. After that, orbs of light materialized around her. She searched but failed to spot the biggest of the lights that usually brought her warmth.

She later found the warm light orb quite a distance away from where she was. However, even at such a distance, she could still feel the light's comforting caress.

"I shall sing for you, the source that bring me solace in a world of darkness..."

As Xi Kong got more immersed in her singing, more radiating orbs of light floated into her periphery and the chaos around her calmed. Lulled by the melody of her song, not only her class, but the entirety of the Hope relaxed, comforted by one another's supportive presence. Even though they couldn't physically see one another, a type of spiritual bond connecting every soul was threading through the Hope.

At the same time, in the transport shuttle, a new Homo Evolutis slowly lifted his space rifle to his heart while drops of tears fell heavily on a locket around his neck. Within the locket was a picture of his son taken on his first birthday. The soldiers around him noticed his actions, but none of them moved to stop him. Even though none of the soldiers were openly weeping, when they looked at the distraught father, they found their inner despair reflected clearly in his eyes.

The shuttles were inches away from the center of the junkyard, but it had been 10 minutes since the Hope had blinked out of existence... It was a torturous 10 minutes that only culminated in despair.

Right before the father pulled the trigger, a song drifted into his ear. In that instance, brilliance returned to his eyes. He shot up, "This is Nian Xi Kong's voice, the girl that got first place during the New Year party! I'm sure because my wife is in love with her voice! It's true! I can hear her singing!"

The buzz of excitement quickly caught up with the rest. They too started hearing the song and instinctively went searching for the source. Some ran to the window to check on the Hope while others ransacked the shuttle. Even after they closed their communicators, the song kept going, like a sweet, balmy, evening wind comforting their wary and anxious hearts.

"This is amazing. They're still alive, the Hope is still there. Yes, my family is still alive!" The father jumped up in joy, swapping his tears of sorrow for those of joy.

Even Yao Yuan's serious expression relaxed after hearing the song. He could pick out the message of calm that ran in the undercurrent of the song... "The Anima... Her song could traverse such a distance and even across the null zone... this is beyond any scientific explanation... But thanks to her, at least we know the Hope is still alive!"

Yao Yuan picked up the communicator and yelled, "Be at the ready! We're moving into the center... We're going to let that AI taste the despair that it has sent us into!"

"Yes, Sir!"

"Good! Let's make this a good one!"

"For the Hope!"

The troop's morale returned with Xi Kong's song. It proved to be

more effective than any inspirational speech that Yao Yuan could ever manage. Of course, the girl didn't know that her plea for comfort had incidentally solved Yao Yuan's biggest problem... At the same time, in a room at the heart of the broken battleship was a creepy conglomerate of random electronic appliances. One would easily mistake it for a heap of trash if not for the active screen situated at the belly of the electronic beast. At this moment, a wall of text in an alien language was shown on it.

The translated meaning was: Discovery of Soul-Web [iseijin](#), Cosmic Adaptation Index (CAI) 840, identity analysis... A caliber, grade S rarity, top priority. Destruction of spaceship cancelled. Assigning new mission: Capture Soul-Web iseijin, increase the creator's particle to its maximum coverage. Prioritize the capture of 4 other grade S cosmic adapters and 2 other super grade S cosmic adapters. Targets must be captured alive... Simultaneously, outside of the Hope, on an almost invisible battleship fragment, almost 10,000 robots were aiming their arms at the Hope. At the end of their arms were the powerful Gaussian rifles. Just as they were going to annihilate the Hope, the light around their bodies shimmered. After that, they put down their weapons and rode the particle flux that came out their bottom spinning plates towards the Hope...

Japanese term for alien.

Chapter 126: Looking for a Way in!

"...How can we find it? Xiao Niao!"

Both shuttles had reached the center of the junkyard. Floating before them were about 10 gigantic battleship fragments, some of them even bigger than the Hope itself!

Some of them were more than 10 kilometers long, and the biggest among them was more than 100 kilometers long, its size at least 10 times that of the Hope!

The fact that they were once a functioning battleship created by an AI was beyond Yao Yuan's comprehension. Lumping together a galaxy-sized battleship willy-nilly was already in itself a mountainous task, much less one that was carefully designed and executed.

Its extraordinariness aside, its enormity was a troublesome hindrance to a search and locate mission!

It would be days before all 300 of them could complete searching the fragments. If done that way, the Hope would perish before they could even locate the AI.

Xiao Niao laughed awkwardly as he shook his head. "I have no clue... It's not that I'm not trying, but this is simply impossible. Upwards of 10 battleship fragments is too big of a range to cover..."

Yao Yuan's expression dimmed because he too knew the mission bordered on impossibility. However, they had to locate the AI with much expedience!

"This AI is too sneaky. It refuses to send out any robots to attack us or defend itself because it knows that'll expose its location..." Xiao Niao said placatingly.

Yao Yuan uttered angrily, "Its elusiveness is indeed our greatest problem. Sadly, our shuttles don't carry any long-ranged weapons like long-distance missiles or high-powered laser beams. We could have blown these fragments into smithereens instead of having to locate that damn AI manually!"

Xiao Niao nodded. "That's true. I'm afraid the AI has already figured out our technological level, and that's why it has such a cavalier attitude to our presence. It's a shame we only have 1 H-bomb... No, wait a sec, we still have 1 H-bomb!"

Yao Yuan looked at Xiao Niao curiously. "Yes, we do have 1 H-bomb, but do you really think 1 H-bomb could level this area? Do you know how big this place is? Wait, unless you mean..."

"Yes, a warning shot!"

Xiao Niao continued sincerely, "If we go back to our inferences, the mastermind behind the attack on the Hope is the AI hiding within these fragments. In other words, this AI is the brain for the body that consists of all the robots... Due to its fear of the Hope's greatly differing technology level, it sent out the robot fleet to

assault the Hope while it stays behind. In this case, no matter whether the Hope ends up captured or the robot fleet gets destroyed, it'll be safely out of harm's way.

"From that we can conclude that the AI is written with some sort of self-preserving algorithm. From a human perspective, we can say it fears death. Of course, the algorithm was probably written with its creator in mind, but since the alien civilization has already been wiped out, the subject of the algorithm most likely got rewritten to refer to itself.

"If that's the case, after we launch the H-bomb at one of the fragments..."

Yao Yuan considered for about 10 seconds after hearing the whole of Xiao Niao's plan and added, "That's probably that best chance we have at finding this AI... Alright, let's do it."

The plan was actually deceptively simple, which was to launch the H-bomb at a random battleship fragment. Since the AI wouldn't know how many H-bombs in total the 2 shuttles were carrying, it would have to prevent them from firing off more H-bombs lest one of them would hit where it was hiding. And when it made a move, its location would be revealed!

"That's the entirety of plan. After I launch the H-bomb from the shuttle, Ying, you'll need to activate your Seeker power to observe any and all changes in our surroundings. Be it a flickering light or the appearance of a robot fleet, the location of any immediate response will probably point us towards the AI!" Yao Yuan explained.

He then turned to Zhang Heng. "Zhang Heng, your mission is no less important. In case Ying's power can't pick up on any changes, we'll be relying on your Diviner power. It is only logical that the place that houses the AI is the spot that's the most heavily guarded. After the explosion, even if there are no outwards changes, there has to be systemic changes within that room, so use your power to locate it!"

"Alright, everyone, that's the game plan. After the AI responds, we can't possibly afford to still float leisurely towards it, their Gaussian weaponry isn't something we could trifle with. That's why after the AI's location is known, these 2 shuttles will fly towards it at full speed and invade the fragment by crashing through the biggest opening available. So stand ready!"

After delivering his orders, Yao Yuan retreated to his shuttle. He entered the password and pulled a small key from a string that hung around his neck. After inserting the key into the keyhole that appeared on the control panel, he turned it, and then a 10 second countdown appeared.

"A nuclear explosion in space... Not my first time witnessing it..." Yao Yuan mumbled as he moved to close the shuttle's windows. With that, Yao Yuan became isolated from the world outside other than scans of the shuttle's radar.

10 seconds later, a large missile was launched from the shuttle. Propelled by rocket fuel, it flew right into a large battleship husk. As it made contact, a ball of light started radiating from within the husk. It glowed like a miniature sun before the vacuum weight of

the cosmos eclipsed it. In that small period of time, almost 1/3 of the husk disappeared... There was not much of a fanfare like it would have if it had exploded within an atmosphere. There was no mushroom cloud or radiating airwaves, but that only made to highlight the H-bomb's great power of devastation... Within the shuttle, Ying stared directly at the floating fragments around them behind the protection of a pair of space-grade tinted binoculars. Blinded by the flash from the bomb, his tears kept falling. Nevertheless, he resisted the urge to blink, afraid of missing any important details. He would not fail the Hope... About 5 seconds after the explosion, the shuttle trained its missile launcher at another husk... Of course, it was all for show, but at that moment, Ying saw a few lights go off and sparks flying in one of the husks. It lasted for barely a second, but it was all captured by the Seeker's power!

"Got it! Coordinates 67, 126, 71!" Ying screamed through the communication while guiding the transport shuttle towards it.

The moment Yao Yuan received Ying's coordinates, he had triangulated them in his mind. The first coordinate referred to the front-back vertical distance of the target from Ying, positive number as forward, negative as back; the second coordinate referred to the horizontal distance, positive as top, negative as bottom; the last coordinate referred to the left-right vertical distance, positive as left, negative as right. Within seconds, the set of coordinates helped Yao Yuan ascertain that the target location was within their viewing range!

"Charge!"

Yao Yuan roared as he pushed his shuttle into full speed. Flames burst from behind the shuttle, and because his shuttle was a more advanced model than the transport shuttle, Yao Yuan reached the designated fragment in mere minutes. Unable to decelerate, Yao Yuan braced for impact as his shuttle slammed into the battleship through a tear on its wall. His shuttle turned into compressed metal and broken parts upon landing, and Yao Yuan should consider himself lucky that it didn't blow up in the process.

The impact from the crash and whiplash from the seat belt made Yao Yuan feel like his bones were shattering. Ultimately, thanks to the protection of his spacesuit, the pain passed and he came off with a slight daze.

Comparatively speaking, the transport shuttle was luckier. It was fitted with the latest particle flux jet apparatus. Its power at deceleration and acceleration was more powerful than Yao Yuan's shuttle even though it lacked consistency and stability. Regardless, because of this device, the transport shuttle remained in a comparatively acceptable state even after the crash landing. Other than some dents, it got off quite easily.

Suddenly, Zhang Heng's voice came through the troop's communicator.

"Be careful! A lot of danger sources... the robots are coming for us!"

Chapter 127: Might of the Homo Evolutis!

Zhang Heng's divination power was very well-known among the Hope's citizens, so much so that he was often stopped to predict humanity's future while he was out on his walks. These encounters made him feel equally humbled and frustrated.

Compared to Chou Yue, whose power occasionally worked, Zhang Heng's power had become a hallmark of the Diviner. The description and entries on the Diviner kept by the Homo Evolutis faction was written with Zhang Heng in mind!

His power was so strong that he had never once failed to predict a source of danger. What he had was more than a simple sixth sense, it was beyond scientific explanation because he could technically see into the future at this point.

Other than the few Homo Evolutis, Yao Yuan's space troopers consisted of trained ex-military, including some from the American Delta Task Force. Trained soldiers that they were, after the troopers were formed, they put in extra effort to get to know their comrades because a strong bond was crucial on the battlefield. When they were doing their rounds, the Thinker, Xiao Niao and Diviner, Zhang Heng were the ones that held their interest the most.

The Thinker was akin to an on-the-spot intelligence processing center, an important asset because many a times a secure feed of information could do wonders to turn the tide of battle. On the other hand, the Diviner was similar to a 24-hour alarm. Not only could he predict danger coming from mines, traps or ambushes

wouldn't escape his detection either.

Before the mission started, Yao Yuan had secretly ordered his Black Star members and these former special ops to look after both Xiao Niao and Zhang Heng because the 2 of them could very well decide the fate of the whole troop.

Therefore, the moment Zhang Heng screamed his warning, everyone moved into their designated stations. Zhang Heng's power hadn't failed them before, so it was unlikely for him to be wrong now!

Yao Yuan roared, "Stick to your pre-assigned units. Then 3 units will form a team because we don't have the luxury to scour the battleship as a complete troop anymore. Split up, but keep communications open. Spread out into the battleship. Priority 1 is to locate the AI. Demolish all robots that stand in the way!

"Listen up, the Hope has lost its power for about 13 minutes. According to the Hope's size and population, its life support can only last for another 30 minutes. After that, the death count will start to climb, beginning with the babies and then the elderly...

"Understand that we don't have much time left! We have to take out the AI as soon as possible!"

Thanks to the 6-month-long training, the space troopers were familiar to moving in space. Using the mini particle flux propellers installed in their palms, they moved around into teams with exceptional balance. Within 10 seconds, all of the teams were

formed, and each team's route was set.

The teams started moving off until it was only Yao Yuan, Ebon, Lee, and Zhang Heng, as well as Xiao Niao, who had been ordered by Yao Yuan to stay behind beforehand.

"We stick together as bait to lure the massive robot fleet away from everyone else," Yao Yuan explained, before ordering Zhang Heng to lead them towards the spot Zhang Heng felt the most robots would congregate.

Along the way, Xiao Niao whistled as ruins of once-great halls and pavilions came into view. "So this is where the 4th revolution will get us... They do look more advanced than what we have now. Luckily, it was a junkyard we stumbled into and not an actual alien battleship fleet. Who knows what disastrous fate would've befallen the Hope then."

Yao Yuan agreed. "Indeed. We should definitely consider ourselves lucky, because even the robots besieging us are half broken. Their outer shell may be indestructible by our standards, but years of disuse has exposed many soft spots. Plus, the internal chip prevents them from using the Gaussian weapons within the spaceship, also giving us the upper hand. Let's not forget we have numbers on our side too.

"Other than that, this battleship itself is barely standing. Even if it was originally fitted with a defense mechanism, I'm pretty sure more than 90 percent of it isn't working. The robots should be our only worry. With everything balancing out, I'd say we have a 50-50 chance of winning this. The only thing that can tip the scales in

our favor is time, so we must earn the rest as much time as we possibly can from the robots!"

Suddenly, Zhang Heng frowned and yelled, "There're at least 10 robots gathering at the room at the end of this corridor!"

Yao Yuan slipped instantly into motion. Unbuckling his Gaussian guns, he fired relentlessly down the darkened corridor. After about 3 rounds, he shifted the trajectory angle and launched yet another hail of bullets. He stopped 8 seconds later and sheathed the guns. When the group reached the field, about 15 robots laid in broken heaps on the floor.

"Lastly, we have one important advantage over the AI: the Homo Evolutis... Don't forget that as the All-Rounder, I too can divine their location!" Yao Yuan said lightly, before moving on.

Needless to say, there were other robots patrolling the battleship, and at least 5 teams had come into contact with them... One of them was Ji Jie's, Ying's, and Liu Bai's units. Under Ying's leadership, they rushed relentlessly into the battleship's depths, making the most progress of all the teams. This was thanks to Ying's Seeker power. He believed that the AI had to be in the area that was the best preserved, as it would have the power structure to keep it alive. By analyzing the different routes' state of decay, Ying brought them ever closer to the AI's hiding spot!

They were running down a long corridor that led to an open corridor when a gauntlet of robots appeared at the pavilion entrance, blocking their way. Before long, more robots appeared on both ends, and they found themselves cornered in the middle of

the corridor.

"It seems like my navigation is correct. The AI must be down this corridor and not far from that pavilion. I've paged for help, but all the nearby teams appear to have their hands full as well. We're on our own."

Ying added, in his usual clipped manner, "I need 3 volunteers... These here are 3 N-Type hand grenades. One of these could level everything within a 300 meter radius and has almost double the blast range. There aren't many of these in stock, so only Black Star members have them. I volunteer because I'm the only one who can tell the correct way, so I only need 2 more volunteers. To be fair to everyone, we'll leave it to fate and do a random drawing. Everyone will throw their names in the hat, including the unit leaders. Is that fine with you, Liu Bai?"

Liu Bai shrugged. "Of course I'll participate. How about you, Miss Ming? What's your decision?"

With her head turned away from everyone else, staring straight ahead at the end of the corridor, she replied silkily, "I wonder... Lieutenant Ying and Lieutenant Liu Bai, have you seen the video recorded by Captain Yao Yuan's spacesuit during his combat with the robots on the exploration mission?" Shielded from view, Ji Jie's eyes were burning with an almost unhinged, homicidal rancor.

Ying and Liu Bai looked at each other before replying in unison, "We have."

"Did the video not remind you of a dance... a dance that transcends the shackles of life, one that glides gracefully between it and death? Watching it, I was visited by an idea... You see, perhaps that is the thing that separates us Homo Evolutis from the filthy banalities of the common folk, the ability to stare death in its eyes and make an art out of it. With that in mind, I feel we should..."

Activating the propeller in her spacesuit, Ji Jie slipped through a soldier standing beside her and swiped the Gaussian gun that hung on his waist. Unsheathing one of her own, Ji Jie shot down the corridor in the speed of light.

The moment she stepped out of the corridor, Ji Jie pressed her feet against the floor and, using the rebound, lifted herself up into the air. The moment her feet lifted off the ground, the spot she was on was already riddled with bullet holes, a few stray shots even blew the few soldiers who stood in the front deeper into the corridor.

Riding the wind, Ji Jie was submerged into a world of silence.

(First the power of Perceptor, then comes Seeker and Diviner... He must have used the Thinker's power as well to keep up the extreme level of multitasking... Ahh, this rush, this dance with death... It's a million times better than having an orgasm!) These thoughts were going through Ji Jie's mind as her body leaped to the top of the pavilion ceiling. Twisting her shoulders, and under the aid of the propeller, she did a somersault in mid-air to turn her body around. Bowing her leg that connected with the ceiling, she launched herself straight as an arrow towards the ground. A row of

bullet holes followed behind her, marking her impossible trail.

Then she started retaliating!

About 8 robots that separately crawled on the floor, climbed the wall, and floated in the air exploded in a shower of lightning sparks and metallic parts!

(Yes! The All-Rounder... is unsurprisingly the height of all Homo Evolutis! He's definitely the only one who is worthy of being my mate! The rest of the Homo Evolutis could be allowed to live if they swear a life of slavery to me... And the other useless human beings must be exterminated like the bugs that they are! But I shouldn't get ahead of myself. I still need to earn his trust and infiltrate these people's highest authority, only then can I...)

Chapter 128: Rescue Mission!

Following the cessation of the Hope's power and consequently life support and anti-gravitational systems, even the Barracks was sent into alarm. However, Guang Zhen's intervention quickly brought the situation back under control. The army was quickly corralled under Guang Zhen's leadership.

Guang Zhen immediately gave out spacesuits and weapons, but unfortunately, the spacesuits were of the older version. Their flexibility and defense paled considerably behind the aerospace combat suit prototype 2s; the weapons were normal rifles, and those unfamiliar with using them in space would end up getting injured by the impressive recoil, an effect that would greatly harm one's accuracy.

Regardless, Guang Zhen had to give them out because they were still better than facing the unknown threat empty-handed. With the Hope on complete shut-down, as acting captain, he needed the army to help him find out what was happening.

"What? Even the communicators within the spacesuits are not working? Same with their life-support system? Only the light source installed with a physical switch is working?" Guang Zhen's heart chilled the moment he heard such reports from his soldiers.

"This is the effect of the null zone! But why is there a null zone so near the Hope?" standing in front of the military warehouse, Guang Zhen yelled.

"That's because we're being invaded by the alien AI!"

A voice pierced the commotion, answering Guang Zhen's question. The soldiers trained their lights at its source, revealing Ren Tao floating towards them, with Chou Yue in tow.

Catching his breath, Ren Tao added, "An AI-controlled battleship or warship piece is within 300 kilometers range of the Hope! That's the only explanation to why the Hope's electrical structure is completely fried with only those devices installed with physical switches still working!"

Spotting Ren Tao, energy could be heard returning to Guang Zhen's voice as he said, "Then we shall hurry the Academy to resolve this null zone and activate the Hope's power reserve in the meantime..."

Ren Tao sighed inwardly before interrupting, "That would be a waste of time. The scientists have spent 6 months deciphering this null zone to no avail. What are the chances they're going to reach a breakthrough now? Plus, this is not a power shortage issue. The null zone doesn't drain the Hope of its power, it merely blocks it. What we need desperately is a device that can help channel electrical currents and signals, bypassing the null zone's interference! We don't have the time to waste on anything else!"

Guang Zhen hesitated before asking Ren Tao, "Then what do you suggest we do now? It's my understanding that life support can only hold on for another 30 minutes before the death toll starts to rise. As the Thinker, do you have any plan in mind?"

"H-bombs!" Ren Tao replied firmly. "Yao Yuan told me that the Hope brought 4 H-bombs when it left Earth. The space troopers took 1 with them, so we should have 3 left. We'll transport one of them into the warship husk using a shuttle. The Hope can only be saved with an explosion!"

Even though Guang Zhen was not a Homo Evolutis, he still retained his cautiousness from his days as a Special Ops leader. He gave Ren Tao's suggestion much thought, especially since this deeply concerned humanity's future.

"No, it won't work! Even though I know the storage location of the H-bombs, the place is locked behind a password-coded door. Firstly, unlike the normal doors, the place will be on complete lockdown should the power cut out. Secondly, using the H-bomb requires several sets of codes, and those are randomly updated by the central mainframe daily. Since all signals and currents are blocked, doesn't that mean the mainframe is down as well? Thirdly, what we have on the Hope now are earlier versions of the shuttles, and their propulsion system is controlled via signals. They couldn't even fly in the null zone, furthermore...

"Wouldn't they be shot down by the robots the moment they leave the Hope?"

Suddenly, a glowing presence slid into the area.

The soldiers instantly trained their arms at it and were shocked to realize the glow was surrounding an alien robot!

Bo Li, who led a group of scientists behind it, quickly stepped out and said, "Don't shoot! This is a robot recovered by my lab. I've rewritten its program, so it is of no harm to us."

Guang Zhen waved his hand and the soldiers put down their weapons. Many stared at the robot in awe, and their collective concern was voiced by Guang Zhen when he said, "This is impossible! The Academy has spent 6 months studying these robots, and even though they've managed some inroads, especially regarding their processor and energy system, the consensus is that their technology is too far ahead of ours. How could you possibly overwrite its internal program?"

Bo Li pointed at her head. "You have the Whisperer's power to thank for that. Do you guys seriously think I've spent the last 6 months idling in the lab? Anyway, now is not the time to discuss that. I couldn't help but overheard your conversation, and honestly, Ren Tao's plan is the only way to save the Hope. I support him."

Guang Zhen hesitated. "But the blockages..."

Bo Li motioned at her robot. "This robot here is immune to the effect of the null zone and can help override that interference in other devices as well. However, he can't replace the central mainframe because his CPU is restricted. Therefore, activating parts of the Hope should be of no issue. We can use him to open the H-bombs storage door and then again to retrieve the codes from the mainframe. Lastly, he can be used as a propeller to push the loaded shuttle into the husk. Its particle accelerator is more

powerful than the shuttle's rocket propellers anyway. Furthermore..."

"We can make use of its ID signal too, right?" Ren Tao asked excitedly. "The enemy robots won't view him as a threat because they share a similar ID signal. Since the robots' CPUs are heavily restricted, they wouldn't be able to detect that Bo Li has hacked into this robot. It's brilliant!"

Bo Li nodded silently.

With all the issues solved, Guang Zhen said hurriedly, "If that's the case, we shall move to the H-bombs warehouse now. But damn, I didn't think we would be invaded so soon... Everyone, let's move out!" Then he led everyone to their destination.

On the way, overwhelmed by curiosity, Guang Zhen asked, "Ren Tao, as a thinker, I didn't believe you would come up with a hapless plan like the one you've just described. You couldn't have predicted Bo Li's appearance, so you must have a plan B... A trump card so to speak. Tell me, what is it?"

Ren Tao laughed wryly. Now he understood why Yao Yuan had such deep trust in his second-in-command. Guang Zhen was not one that could be easily fooled. He believed that in such situations, honesty was the best policy, so he answered, "My trump card is the UFO... Don't be so surprised that I know of its existence. The Thinker is useless without a firm grasp of information, so Yao Yuan realized it was not to his benefit holding information back from me. The UFO's technology is higher than that of the junkyard, so much so that we couldn't tell which industrial

revolution it would place itself in.

"Regardless, it is certain that its technology is greater than the AI's. Then, it goes without saying that it would be immune to the null zone's interference. If all else fails, we'll have to hope that it'll step in... After all, it has stayed hidden for all this while and not lifted a finger against us... one has to ask 'why.' Is it for purely observation, or something more? Either way, even though we might be as insignificant as ants, we are still valuable assets for whatever purpose it has in mind. On this point alone, I doubt it'll allow us be wiped out by an external force..."

Ren Tao sighed before adding, "The Thinker's plan isn't fool-proof. When there's a lack of variables, one can only gamble and leave it up to God, which in this case is the UFO... I understand it's a giant gamble, but that's the only solution... that is until, like you said, Bo Li appeared like a ray of hope in the dark."

Guang Zhen didn't pursue the conversation because they were close to their destination. With Guang Zhen's help, Bo Li's robot hacked into the electronic lock by intercepting its internal wiring and overriding the lock using the robot's processor. After that, the door came back online and gradually opened to reveal a large space that housed 3 giant missiles.

They were mankind's greatest weapon at this time... 3 high-yield tactical H-bombs!

Chapter 129: Electromagnetic Shield!

"...142 fatalities so far, including 1 Homo Evolutis... Such heavy casualties..."

As the space troopers pushed deeper into the battleship, the death count kept increasing in Yao Yuan's field report. Based on the reports thus far, the space troopers had suffered more than 50 percent fatality rate, and it showed no sign of decreasing!

Yet they pressed onwards, riding on both battlefield fervor and the need to protect their families back on the Hope. The closer they got to the AI, the more robot guards they encountered.

The robot fleet was separated into smaller cavalcades to face the space trooper units of differing sizes, a sound sign that they were managed by an overseer AI. However, with all its intelligence, the AI underestimated one crucial detail... The combative power of the Homo Evolutis!

Even those newly recruited Homo Evolutis adapted seamlessly into space combat like fish to water. Faced with challenges like a zero-gravity environment, multi-dimensional combat, and multi-layered tactics, they still managed to maintain an upper hand over the robots!

Based on Yao Yuan's observation, of all the superhuman powers, the Perceptor's was the most suitable for combative situations. Compared to other powers, the Perceptors seemed destined to be used in battles, and the Perceptors happened to be the majority

among the Homo Evolutis!

Along the way, Yao Yuan's unit had demolished more than a thousand robots. Simultaneously, this meant that they had the most robot guards on their tail. However, with Zhang Heng's help, they managed to evade death by using the broken down battleship to their advantage by scurrying through broken down walls as well as debris that could be used as stairs. Anxious for their capture or death, the AI had sent more than 10,000 robots on their pursuit!

Currently, they were on their way to meet up with Ying's unit because Ying's report said that they were extremely close to the AI's hiding spot but were being held back by a large group of robot guards. With such valuable information, Yao Yuan had no choice but to rush to liaise with Ying's unit even if it meant bringing the 10,000 robots with him. The lethal cat-and-mouse game would only be stopped after the AI has been disposed of, after all.

When Yao Yuan arrived at the pavilion, he found Ying's unit finishing off the last few robots. As the robots crumbled to the ground, Yao Yuan found himself stunned beyond words... There were around 2,000 robot carcasses around the area, but Ying's unit had suffered no casualties... When had Ying's unit become so unstoppable?

"It's not us... It's her, she's unbelievable... You should have seen it... It was like what happened with you on the exploration mission. She basically danced between hails of bullets darting around the pavilion. There were no nooks or crannies that she didn't use. I wouldn't have believed it if I didn't see it with my own eyes. Thanks to her help distracting most of the robots, we were

able to clear out the area with hand grenades, but it seems like she's at her limit already," Ying said, while pointing at the repose Ji Jie.

Yao Yuan followed Ying's finger and found a smiling Ji Jie sleeping on the floor. Her face was incredibly flushed, not unlike the final radiance that appeared on Jay before he collapsed. Then again, her expression was different. She didn't look like she was in pain but rather... like a woman satisfied.

Yao Yuan shook his head to clear his mind and said, "Bring her along, it looks like her Perceptor power is stronger than we anticipated, we can't leave her here... Ying, lead the way! We have only 10 minutes left, quick!"

Ying instantly activated his seeker power and pointed down a corridor. "This way, it looks the least damaged!"

So everyone rushed down the path. With more than a handful of Homo Evolutis, and not to mention, Yao Yuan, the All-Rounder, they basically ran over everything that stood in their way.

After they turned round several corridors, they arrived at an almost perfectly preserved central field. Other than a few broken apparatuses, the well-lit space was free from any perceptible damage. As they stepped into the area, some floating metallic plates surged towards them.

Everyone immediately lifted their guns, but the plates stayed still even after several seconds. They waited patiently about 10

centimeters in front of their feet.

"...This must be a means of transportation that can be used to replace walking," an awed Xiao Niao said. "It's amazing how much can change with just one additional industrial revolution..."

Yao Yuan stopped to study the plates. They had a shiny surface and each was about 5 centimeters thick. In other words, there were probably tons of machinery parts inside. Yao Yuan believed they contained something that was similar to the stuff inside the round plates that held up the robots. They made up a horizontal escalator that relied on the static charge that worked between the plate and the battleship's metallic floor.

"The AI is most likely in this area. Everyone, be careful; there has to be an ambush!" Yao Yuan said, before rushing headfirst into the field.

Since there was the benefit of good lighting, they almost instantly managed to locate the spot where the robots gathered. It was a helical structure that seemed to be screwed into the battleship. It was tethered by pipes that were attached to the ceiling and walls of the battleship. At the building's conspicuous entrance, the entourage came upon a pair of robots that was obviously different from the ones they had faced so far!

This robot had a humanoid appearance except for the fact that instead of legs, it had 6 spider-like appendages and 4 multi-jointed arms instead of 2. They were the best preserved of all the robots they'd seen so far.

However, Yao Yuan's team could still theoretically make mincemeat out of them with their Gaussian guns... if not for the fact that they were immune to this threat!

When the group arrived at the cluster of robots shielding the entrance, they made quick work of them. Several hundred robots perished under the combined fire of both Gaussian guns and space rifles. Unfortunately, 4 of their unit mates fell during the crossfire too... Finally, only these 2 special robots remained. No matter whether they were hit with the Gaussian guns or space rifles, a shimmering layer would appear, neutralizing the bullets. In retaliation, their 4 arms changed into gun muzzles to return the bullet hell back at Yao Yuan's group. Furthermore, like actual spider legs, the 6 lower body appendages allowed them to stick onto and move around all surfaces with an incredible speed. The 4 fatalities were by their hands!

"God damn it! Energy shield? We should have anticipated that they would have the technology..." An anxious Yao Yuan lamented. Even though the two robots traversed the area with great agility, they made sure they were 1 jump away from the entrance. Therefore, the plan to use bait was impossible. They had been stalled at a stalemate for about 5 minutes. As time stretched closer to the 30 minutes deadline, Yao Yuan started to sweat.

Another person who was breaking out in cold sweat was Xiao Niao. He was almost shot down by the robot but was saved at the last minute by a soldier who courageously jumped in front of him. The mixture of shock and appreciation rendered him speechless.

However, his brain kept turning, picking up on their surroundings, details that they had seen or missed, until a scene flashed in his mind. It was about the metallic plates that worked as transportation. He shouted, "No, it's not an energy shield! That's impossible with their technology. This is electromagnetic shield! They can only neutralize metallic objects! That's why all our bullets are useless. The way it works is... is like how Magneto can stop bullets from hurting him in X-Men!"

Yao Yuan stopped to process the information before reprimanding him. "Are you suggesting plastic bullets? Where are we to find plastic bullets now? Stop kidding! Damn, we didn't expect the AI to keep such a powerful technology in reserve. He purposely did not put it in the normal robots so that we couldn't possibly prepare for it!" As he finished, he threw his gun away and looked up at the red dot blinking at the top of his space helmet.

Xiao Niao saw Yao Yuan's pupils moved upwards, so he yelled, "Yao Yuan! What you are trying to do?"

Yao Yuan replied, with surprising calm, "Xiao Niao, thank you. You've managed to figure out another important piece of valuable information at such a crucial time... Your mission is officially at an end now, so leave the rest to us soldiers. Ying! I will get in close to the 2 robots. The spacesuit is made up of ceramic weave, so it should be safe from harm. Since their mechanical arms are jointed, that has to be their weak points. And if I can't incapacitate them, I'll use my body to entangle them in my grasp. Hopefully that'll be able to buy you fellas some time...

"I'll leave the AI to you. Give it a good thrashing for me!"

Before the rest of them could respond, Yao Yuan flew into the fray pushed by the propellers on his back.

As they recovered from shock, both Ying and Liu Bai shouted, "As Black Stars, for glory!"

"Or for death!"

Yao Yuan's last words came back in an echo...

Chapter 130: The Nameless One

Back on the Hope, Guang Zhen was leading a whole gang of people to the central mainframe. As they passed through the staircase, Guang Zhen sent a section of his soldiers down to the residential areas to help maintain order.

However, all of their effort would be wasted if Bo Li's robot was unable to activate the central mainframe and retrieve from within it the codes necessary to access the H-bombs.

Suddenly, Chou Yue shivered. She hesitated before whispering into Ren Tao's ears, "I'm not sure whether it was me overthinking it, but I just sensed danger spreading through the Hope lowest 3 levels."

Ren Tao asked hastily, "Danger? What kind of danger? Is it manmade or natural?"

Chou Yue shook her head. "I can't tell for sure, but THEY are still some distance away, some of them moving at an unbelievable speed..."

"Has to be the robots!"

Ren Tao grabbed hold of Guang Zhen. "This is bad. The AI has sent robots to infiltrate the Hope. They're moving to strategic locations as we speak, we must hurry!"

Guang Zhen was shocked by the sudden news. He had personally seen what the robots were capable of, their power of flight, and that Gaussian rifle that could tear through the barrier of sound and shred the Hope like soft cheese!

Ren Tao noted the change in Guang Zhen's expression and said hurriedly, "Don't worry, since the robots are on the Hope, this means that the AI has no intention of destroying this ship. It's not too late... as long as we still have a breath in us!"

Guang Zhen alternated between worry and relief. Finally he issued an order between gritted teeth, "Move faster!" and the group increased in speed.

In Guang Zhen's mind, the Hope's residential levels was already a soulless town... But did that mean that they should just give up? He knew in his heart that the answer was no, but could they possibly take on the robot fleet on their own? Realistically, he realized it was unlikely!

The fact that the Hope was left with only upwards of 100 combat suit prototype 2 and Gaussian gun prototype 2s aside, other than the few selected Homo Evolutis, none of the soldiers could conduct battle in space. Plus, they were inside the Hope. They had to be wary of harming the ship itself, so they couldn't be insouciant with the usage of their Gaussian guns. On the other hand, the robots could freely employ their Gaussian rifles... One couldn't help but wonder how many human lives would be left after this ruthless massacre.

Was their only possible future to rebuild with a small collection

of human survivors? Was that even feasible in space? Wouldn't they be consumed wholly by the impenetrable darkness of the cosmos?

With all these thoughts swirling in their minds, the group arrived at the central mainframe room, where they were joined by the soldiers that patrolled the area. The spherical robot guards that secured the area lay about in inactive heaps, not one showing signs of life.

After a perfunctory report, Guang Zhen led everyone to the mainframe servers. Using an external keyboard, Bo Li controlled her robot to fuse its own wiring to that of the computer's. As the link was formed, the mainframe showed small signs of reviving, but regretfully, the alien robot alone was still too weak to power the Hope's mainframe!

"Wait a minute. The information flow is too large. I'll need about 5 minutes to retrieve the details that we need!" Bo Li mumbled as she read the data that appeared on the screen hooked onto robot's chest.

"5 minutes?!"

Guang Zhen echoed as he snuck a peek at his watch. 20 minutes had passed since the lights went out, so they had another 10 minutes before they reached the critical stage. In other words, they needed to load the H-bomb onto the shuttle in 5 minutes and move it to the warship in the other remaining 5... It was going to be a desperate race against time!

At the same time, the UFO under the mainframe was radiating a pearly-white glow. The glow revealed semi-transparent dust particles that were dancing on its shell.

A stream of information passed through the mainframe from the UFO into the robot, an exchange that was indiscernible by human eyes.

The robot kept on processing silently as the seconds ticked by. Some of the soldiers started pacing around the area, working off their nerves.

It took 4 minutes for several sets of codes to appear on the robot's chest. A scientist that stood beside Bo Li rushed forward with a notepad to scribble them down. With the codes in their grasp, Gaung Zhen said, "Quick, we need to get to the bridge. I've sent some people to carry the H-bomb there beforehand. They should be ready by now! We only need to key in these codes to launch the missile!"

They ran into no roadblocks on the way there, but they were weighted down by a heavy silence.

The H-bomb itself was controlled via electronic signals, so the shuttle had to be within 10 meters off the warship before it could be launched... The shuttle would definitely be consumed by the nuclear blast... In other words, launching the H-bomb was a sacrifice mission!

Humans are selfish by nature, so there was no volunteer to take on this mission. Everyone was waiting for someone braver to step forth. As Guang Zhen scanned the crowd, every pair of eyes instinctually shifted away... Guang Zhen couldn't fault their nature because he knew every single soldier present would still complete the mission if he was to order them... Much deliberation went into that choice because a single soldier was going to be responsible for saving tens of thousands of lives, and by extension, ensuring the continuity of human civilization.

Human history hadn't seen 1 individual being labored with such important responsibility before... Guang Zhen knew they only had 1 chance of getting it right. A candidate forced into the mission by the weight of his order might not have the focus to parse the timing, angles, and calibration perfectly to pull off a successful mission.

If the missile missed its target, Guang Zhen would have to shoulder the blame of failing humanity. How desperate he wished for there to be a volunteer!

"I'll do it!"

Guang Zhen sighed, and added, in a calm voice, "I know how to pilot the shuttle, and I am part of the Black Star Unit and a Special Ops agent... I'm the perfect candidate for this job. Since Ol' Yao has placed the Hope in my care, it's only fair that I take on this responsibility. Everyone else, return to your stations. Be on the lookout for the robots..."

Before Guang Zhen could finish, he felt something coming

towards him from behind. He ducked instinctively, but because he had forgotten they were in space, he got the angle all wrong. Unable to avoid the blow, Guang Zhen fainted and slumped to the floor.

His assailant was a young soldier. He knocked Guang Zhen out using the butt of his rifle. Everyone trained their weapons at him, and the young soldier tossed his weapon away without giving much resistance. He then said lightly, "Let me be the volunteer. I was the back-up unit for the space troopers but ultimately didn't make it in. I've been through the training and simulations, plus I know how to pilot the shuttle. Most importantly, I hold no important position and am emotionally unattached... No one will mourn my loss, so give me the codes and let me do this."

Everyone put down their guns and went into silence. Bo Li squatted down to pull the codes out of Guang Zhen's hand. Handing it over to the young soldier, she said, "...anything else you want to say?"

The young soldier accepted the codes with a candid smile, saying, "I believe I have said everything I want to say... Actually, one final word: I love the Hope like it is my home. A place where neighbors smile at one another as everyone works towards a better future. It's a paradise on Earth... or I should say, in space..." Then he put on his spacesuit and walked to the shuttle hangar where the robot was already waiting. It was programmed to carry the shuttle piloted by this young soldier towards the nearest alien signal relay... the invisible battleship husk!

"We didn't even catch his name," Chou Yue whispered.

Ren Tao grimaced as the young soldier's final candid smile crossed his mind. He sighed, "It's always the nameless ones... that surprise everyone."

The soldier seated himself in the shuttle. He grabbed hold of the cross that hung from his neck and prayed as the Hope drifted further away from view.

"God, please hear me. Please lend your aid to humanity by protecting the Hope, this slice of heaven where people exist in blissful harmony...

"Amen!"

Chapter 131: Courage!

When Yao Yuan propelled himself towards the pair of robots, he harbored neither reservation nor hope of coming out the other end alive! The odds were greatly stacked against him.

He had no weapons and planned to tussle with the robots barehanded!

The robots had guns, electromagnetic shields, and not to mention, 6 legs and 4 hands!

If this was a movie, this scene would be where the hero sacrificed himself in a glorious death!

Yao Yuan knew Homo Evolutis were uncannily strong in space combat, but there was ultimately a limit to that strength. One couldn't single-handedly change the course of nature even if one poured one's entire life in it... (Fine, one last gamble! No, I can't die yet! The Hope still needs me! But I'm so tired...What I'm doing is evading responsibility! I can't let myself sink so low! I promised to lead humanity to a better future!) As Yao Yuan stared at the specter of death, all these indelible memories and commitments flashed through his mind.

In his mind's eye, he could see 2 distinct Yao Yuans, one was the leader of the Hope and the rock humanity placed its faith on, while another was a loving husband who stood beside a beautiful young woman, teasing the baby cradled in her arms... The dual images of himself seared themselves into Yao Yuan's mind even though they

had only appeared for less than 1 second. Yao Yuan then trained his attention fully at the 2 humanoid robots.

They had to be exemplary products of this alien civilization because there was, in total, so few of them. Other than that, Yao Yuan had some inkling about the electromagnetic shield, a technology partially mentioned by the Academy as possible future-tech, a shield produced by an electromagnetic device that could construct a strong static field without harming its user. Yao Yuan had seen it in action because the robots were metallic products, but they were obviously unharmed by the electromagnetic field.

All of these were technological conditions that mankind still couldn't meet. Nevertheless, it didn't mean that there wasn't improvement available for this technology. Unlike energy shields found in typical sci-fi, these electromagnetic shields could only defend against metallic threats, and they exhausted an enormous amount of energy. Furthermore, they only worked against fast-moving threats. For example, if one was to come at the shield with a slow-moving knife, it wouldn't be able to block it.

Because of these weaknesses, Yao Yuan managed to engage the robots in close-quarter combat. Here was another sign that the shield wasn't perfect. If the shield was powerful enough to completely block all metallic objects, Yao Yuan wouldn't even be able to get near because there were metallic devices sewn into his spacesuit.

As Yao Yuan jumped out of cover, the pair of robots trained their weapons at him and fired. Yao Yuan could feel the bullets slicing the air beside him.

Yao Yuan dared not rush at the robots down a straight line. Instead, like Ji Jie, he flitted through the area, moving towards the robots from multiple angles. Thanks to his Perceptor power, every single one of his landing sites, flight time, angle, and rebound force were intuited with surgical precision. In less than 5 seconds, he found himself in front of one of the robots.

With a powerful kick against the ground, Yao Yuan sprung straight into the air, aided by the propeller. Just as it appeared he was going way too far over the robot's reach, he grabbed at the robot's head as support, pulling himself back before latching on to the robot's back!

Of course, the robot wasn't going to go down that easily. It turned its head 180 degrees around and its hands started spinning upwards. As Yao Yuan stared into the robot's glassy eyes, the 4 robotic arms were closing in on him like a metallic venus flytrap.

Yao Yuan cursed loudly and then, using the robot's head as a fulcrum, spun out of its deadly grasp. The arms closed with a resounding clang. If he had leaped one second later, he would've been crushed!

Simultaneously, the other robot fired another round of bullets at him. Stuck in mid-air, Yao Yuan knew it was physically impossible for him to evade. He bit down hard, preparing for the pain... Surprisingly, none came. All of the bullets were caught in a shimmering shield before falling flatly to the ground. It turned out Yao Yuan was under the protection of the other robot's shield.

Yao Yuan didn't stop to count his lucky stars. Instead, he grabbed onto one of the robot's arms and, using the propeller, flew once again up into the air. Using the arm as an axle, he started spinning in mid-air. He spun for 3 complete circles... before everything resolved in a loud bang and a violent quake!

Yao Yuan had twisted the arm off the robot's body. Flailing about in a shower of sparks, the arm flew about 10 meters away directly into a wall, bringing Yao Yuan with it.

"Nice!"

Yao Yuan yelled inwardly, while Ying, Liu Bai, Zhang Heng, and the rest yelled out loud. Acknowledging the break they need, Ying waved for his unit's attention and shouted, "Other than Zhang Heng and Xiao Niao, who have been tasked to stay, the rest, if you're not afraid of death, follow me!" Then he leaped out from behind his cover.

Everyone else, both Homo Evolutis and normal soldiers included, followed suit, chanting a blood-raising war cry as they charged towards the room housing the AI. Both Zhang Heng and Xiao Niao stayed obediently put, more than a little disgruntled that they couldn't participate in the action.

Finally noticing them, the pair of robots switched to focus on Ying and his party. However, they were ultimately too late. Yao Yuan slammed into one of them from afar, carrying it with him several meters away. The robot with 1 arm torn off was the one remaining. As it prepared to fire... "For humanity!"

One of the soldiers suddenly screamed. He already had his eyes close to the red dot before the robot made its move. With his propellers activated, he flew directly into the robot's trajectory line. Because he wasn't a Homo Evolutis, his body convulsed as the bullets made impact before blood spluttered out in floating pools from the many puncture wounds like a grotesque show.

The soldier's last words still reverberated into everyone's communicator... for humanity!

The soldier's body was carried helplessly forward by the propellers and rammed hard into the robot. More blood oozed out upon impact, and tiny globules of blood started filling the air around them... "Tell my wife that I love her!"

Another soldier activated his propellers and knocked the robot down again before it could recover. Before the soldier could escape, 3 robotic arms surged towards him and impaled him. The arms pulled themselves apart and blood exploded in circular halos... Watching the scene unfold, both Zhang Heng and Xiao Niao had tears flowing freely in their spacesuits. At that moment, they understood why people said that the road towards victory was paved with the blood of heroes and warriors!

Zhang Heng suddenly growled. Activating his propellers, he too flew towards the robot. He was immediately followed by Xiao Niao. The pair followed the previous soldier's trail, right at the 1-arm-missing robot.

When Ying saw Zhang Heng and Xiao Niao rushing forward, he cursed lividly. "Those 2 idiots... Stop using your propellers! Leave the robot to the two of them! They are at least Homo Evolutis... Damn it, quick, follow me! We will make the AI pay for pushing us to such crazy ends!"

The rest of them followed Ying and Liu Bai silently deeper into the building. Unknown to many, their lips were already bleeding from grinding their teeth too hard, as angry, determined, and shocked as they were. They soldiered on with courage in their hearts... a courage that stemmed from their willingness to lay down their lives for the safety of their families, the Hope, and humanity!

Leading the team, no one noticed that Ying's lips were already bitten until they were blood red... "You lovable dummy, I have a question for you. What do you think life is?"

"Life? Being alive I suppose."

"Wrong answer! Let me tell you, everyone has a different definition of what life is. Like how it's written in the book, for some it's heavier than a mountain, for others it's lighter than a feather. How about this, when you grow older and have a better understanding of life, could you tell me what it is?"

"...Okay, I promise you."

When Yao Yuan came to, he was hugging the robot's arm. He tried to twist it off, but the robot made use of his own force to

throw him hard against the floor. He coughed out a mouthful of blood and then fainted.

When he came to next, the robot was ready to slam him again into the floor. Putting every bit of his energy into his arms, Yao Yuan pushed himself up and leaped onto the robot's head. With a mighty roar, he pulled the head into a gridlock and, using the power provided by the propellers, twisted it off. The robot was finally forced into deactivation.

"Life is courage."

The courage to fight, the courage to live, and the courage to sacrifice oneself for others, the courage that was exemplified by Zhang Heng and Xiao Niao, who were still in combat with the robot, and the other 5 to 6 soldiers who gave their lives to aid humanity... Tears slid down Yao Yuan's face. He looked at Zhang Heng and Xiao Niao keenly, but with a turn of his heel, he ran down the other direction, pursuing Ying and Liu Bai, heading towards the AI!

Chapter 132: Victory!

Yao Yuan rushed straight ahead. However, his speed started to slow because the energy of his propellers started to run out. Along the way, he saw 5 more bodies!

Thankfully, neither Ying nor Liu Bai were among them. Weirdly enough, the bodies looked like they had been sliced through by a sharp wire, and their wounds had signs of burning. It was obvious that they had been killed by laser weapons!

The corridor was set with laser traps.

As Yao Yuan stepped into the corridor, he instantly noticed that something was off. The apparatus found in the area looked crude and arid; in other words, not products that corresponded to this civilization's technological status.

"...Does this mean the AI wasn't born here but moved here after the battleship was destroyed?"

Yao Yuan activated his Thinker's power to search for a logical answer. Depending on this answer, there could be 2 wildly different scenarios.

If the AI was originally born here, then it meant that the AI had a similar importance as the Hope's central mainframe. This meant that the alien civilization would heavily guard this AI's existence, so the road ahead would be incredibly dangerous. Chances were he might perish before he could lay eyes on this AI.

If, on the other hand, the AI moved here after the civilization met its end, that would mean that either the AI was, in some way, restricted by the aliens before they perished, or it had gained singularity while in service to its creators. Either way, in these cases, the AI had to rely on pre-existing tools for defense, and they wouldn't be as advanced as the AI itself, so things should be easier.

While Yao Yuan was lost in his thought, he turned a corner to find Ying's party forming a barricade with their weapons trained in his direction. He quickly waved. "It's me! What's wrong? Why are we stopping?"

Ying's party sighed in relief and their morale had a conspicuous raise. A few of them couldn't even get their words out, overwhelmed by excitement of seeing their captain.

As expected of him, Ying explained calmly, "There's a wide laser field ahead blocking our way. We already had volunteers die going into it... but so far, we still can't find the energy panel necessary to shut it down."

"Use a hand grenade!"

Yao Yuan said, without hesitation, and he retrieved from his toolkit one of those and passed it to Ying, adding, "I have 1 extra, here. Time's running out, 2 minutes, quick!"

Ying took the grenade and yelled, "Get back behind the safety line! Prepare to storm ahead!" Then he pulled the safety pin off the

grenade.

After everyone scurried behind Yao Yuan, Ying activated his power to full capacity as he prepared to lob the grenade. The weight of the grenade, the arc, and the landing spot were intuited by his power. The Seeker's power was pretty much a godsend for a long-ranged snipers like him. As the grenade left his hand, Ying quickly scurried back. With a helpful pull from Yao Yuan, he slid behind the safety line.

The corridor was blasted with a resounding boom. People tumbled to the floor while debris blown away by the blast flew dangerously over their heads. As the dust settled, Yao Yuan was the first to stand up. He strode to the end of the corridor and a giant crater came into view. Broken circuits littered the area, stray electricity surging everywhere.

"Let's move! The ceramic weaved spacesuit is electric-proof! As long as none of the lasers are still functioning, we have nothing to fear!" Yao Yuan howled as he moved forward.

There was not one shred of fear that still lingered among the troopers. After witnessing so many brave sacrifices, every one of them had stared directly at the abyss of death, and none looked away. With death-defying awareness, they followed Yao Yuan.

After scurrying for so long in the dark, the first thing that hit them about the final room was its overwhelming brightness. In the middle of the room was an amalgamation of multiple reflective metallic plates that looked like solar panels. This weird amalgamation was also where hundreds of wires congregated. Its

construction looked surprisingly haphazard, and with Yao Yuan's and Ying's Seeker powers, they saw that the connecting joints were also welded amateurishly.

As they walked deeper into the room, the panels started blinking a phenomenon not unlike the synapses in our brains starting up.

"Is this the AI?" Yao Yuan looked at the weird amalgamation closely. To be frank, it was totally different from the image of the AI he had in mind. From appearance alone, it was just a bunch of metal plates welded together with random wiring. It looked less impressive than the Hope's central mainframe. Yao Yuan had a hard time believing this was the mastermind behind The Hope's biggest threat yet.

Regardless, Yao Yuan didn't intend to dawdle. He waved his hand in the air and everyone trained their weapons at the metal plates. Yao Yuan took out his last grenade, and just before he was going to remove the safety pin, a voice could be heard through everyone's communicators.

"Iseijin, a proposal for collaboration. I have tons of technology that can, according to your lingo, usher in your 4th industrial revolution, and I'll even offer 3 items from your 5th industrial revolution that I've bought from other iseijin merchant..."

"Cut the crap!"

Yao Yuan threw his grenade. The room was large enough that those standing at the entrance wouldn't be affected by the grenade

blast. They stood staring ahead with steely gazes, unmoved by the AI's offer.

"Yes, mankind still has a long way to go, but we will never stoop to liaising with a heartless AI..."

Yao Yuan said, rather condescendingly. "There are definitely difficulties in store for us in the future, but I'll see that we overcome it with our own strength... Now, 1 last parting word, have you not learned anything after scouring through our history like a desperate pervert?

"We forgive but don't forget! [Consider yourself lucky that we're only taking your 1 life in place of the many you've taken!](#)"

The grenade detonated above the heap of metal plates. The place started to collapse under pressure, and before long, the room was buried... Simultaneously, outside of the Hope, the shuttle was still gliding towards the invisible battleship. As it passed the null zone, the electricity within the shuttle returned. The young soldier who was praying in genuflection leaped up and activated the shuttle's rocket propeller and scanner.

"Freaking alien race! Here I come bearing gifts, a space fireworks show. I guarantee you'll love it!"

The young soldier drew a cross on his chest and kissed the cross dangling from his neck. Then the shuttle started flying at full speed towards the battleship. At the same time, he entered the missile codes. He was going to fire the minute he got close enough!

Unknown to him, the robot that was pushing the shuttle suddenly had the light wreathing its body changed. It stopped and returned to the Hope... like it had started thinking on its own!

Inside the shuttle, the young soldier wore a calm mask of acceptance. He sat steadily looking out the shuttle's back window... looking at his home, the Hope.

"Goodbye, Hope. Goodbye, fellow friends. Goodbye, Mary... I wish you the best of luck."

When the robot was about 20 kilometers away from the shuttle, the young soldier pressed the launch button without much ceremony. Small, metallic bits shot through the shuttle, piercing through the young man in the process. The next second, a blinding light emerged, a flash strong enough to rival that of a sun. It was followed by record-breaking heat and devastation... 1 minute and 27 seconds after the explosion, the web of unknown particles covering the Hope disappeared, and following that, the Hope was suddenly bathed in light.

Then the anti-gravitational and life-support systems kicked in. After that, it was the resuscitation of the central mainframe... The glow around the robots that had been rampaging through the Hope capturing isolated targets and killing the rest shimmered and suddenly, all of them stopped moving... They had won... Mankind had won!

The original text is "We humans are the most violent and bloodthirsty beings! Don't look down on cornered humans!" which I felt doesn't flow well so I've changed it.

Chapter 133: Pain

"Fire! Bow! Salute!"

Following the firing of blank ammunition, about 200 coffins were released into space. Among the crowd, some were openly weeping while others bowed their heads in grief. The soldiers present remained in a solemn salute.

Of the 301 space troopers that left, only 33 returned!

And, just like how Yao Yuan predicted, every single one of them returned a hero!

According to the Academy's aftermath analysis, even though the battleship fragment near the Hope exploded, the robots would tear through the Hope from within.

Thankfully, Yao Yuan managed to defeat the AI in the nick of time. With their overseer fallen, the robots lost their activity. In reality, they were still fully functional, patiently awaiting another set of orders.

Today was the 7th day after the infiltration. According to Chinese customs, this special date was also known as [Tou Qi](#).

It was why all the surviving troopers, the Hope's military, the families of the deceased, reporters, members from House of Representatives, and 2,000 selected civilians were gathered at the

ship's hangar for the Hope's third celestial burial.

"Ceremony over!"

All of the soldiers went at ease, but none of them moved nor chatted. They stood firmly, staring at the host of coffins that slowly drifted out of view. A mixture of pride and sadness mingled in their eyes... Hardened by war, the remaining troopers stood transfixed and emotionless. Only when they were in the company of their families would they let their guard down and show emotion.

This time Yao Yuan didn't slumber for 13 days like before. On the night of the 6th, as if someone was pulling him awake, he woke up to participate in the special burial.

All through the ceremony, other than the host, none of the leading figures moved to the podium. The burial was conducted with extreme solemnity. At the end, other than the families, the rest dispersed in respectful silence.

"Giving a speech to praise them would be an insult to their sacrifice!"

On the way back, Yao Yuan told Barbie.

No one knew the scope of their sacrifice if they weren't part of the troop. They fought, they struggled, and eventually they died, apart from and for their families on the Hope, whose fate was an

unknown... Having a gaudy celebration would only sully the memory of their heroic deeds!

"Following the protocol, the records of their names, deeds, and combat videos will be saved into the central mainframe's history folder. Also, don't leave out that nameless hero. They'll be given the Hope's greatest honor, the hero badge. Actually, let me correct myself. Make sure to use the name 'Arnold Vett' instead of 'the nameless hero.' We must make sure humanity's future citizens know that they are alive because of these selfless people!"

Barbie jotted everything down efficiently. Suddenly, Yao Yuan started coughing. The fit was so intense that some blood escaped into the air. Barbie quickly passed him a handkerchief and asked worriedly, "What's wrong, Captain? Are you OK?"

Yao Yuan shook his head as he wiped the corner of his mouth with the handkerchief. "Don't worry. I injured my lungs during combat, but I'm sure it'll be fine after a good rest... Then again, who has the time? The paperwork is already piling up in the captain's room."

Barbie looked at Yao Yuan concernedly but kept her thoughts to herself.

The week after the infiltration was spent in mourning. The robots had killed 1471 people. Because of the power outage, the number of babies who died from low temperature and lack of oxygen was 362.

Combined with the casualty from the space troopers, the entirety of the Hope lost about 2,000 people!

That was an astronomical number that would cause great effect for any non-warring city on Earth, much less one in space!

For the Hope, the 2,000 loss was an unmitigated catastrophe! The Hope only had 120,000 people to begin with, so losing that many able-bodied adults in one go was, to say the least, worrying. The ratio of loss scope-wise was akin to the Earth being swallowed by a giant tsunami!

After Yao Yuan came back from the funeral, he threw himself into the business of the citizens' death gratuity. Even though he had aid from Hall of Communications, there were still plenty of things that needed him to personally oversee.

Other than civil business, there were other things to take care of as well... "What do you mean none of the robots can be used? Are you kidding me? You're telling me all these robots' resources can't be recycled?! Do you know how many lives have been lost to gather them!?" Yao Yuan fired with a voice no less than a roar.

Sitting before him was Bo Li. The girl was barely there, tired as she was from a whole sleepless week going through upwards of 10,000 robots.

"That's right. When you crushed the AI, the internal information processor for the robots was fried. These processors are like hearts for these robots. Without them, they can't possibly function," Bo

Li said as she leaned forward lightly to take the cup of tea off the table and started sipping.

Yao Yuan sat back down. Frustrated, he said, "But... Damn it. So many robots with Gaussian guns and particle accelerators; we're talking about 10,000 of them on this ship alone! There has to be more in the junkyard, and now they're all useless. Damn it!"

Bo Li's mouth curled up in a smile, but it was covered by the cup and quickly disappeared. "We can still salvage the parts. The Gaussian technology can be used to improve and perfect our Gaussian gun, while the particle accelerator could be used in the combat suit's propellers to increase its flight time and power. Even the robots' shells are usable... if we melt them down. They're made from a metal that is much more advanced than our current metallurgy technology, so I suggest we melt them down into blocks to be kept for future use."

Yao Yuan sighed. "Understood, we'll follow what you suggest."

Bo Li nodded slightly and set the cup down. Without another word, she made to leave the room. Suddenly, Yao Yuan called her name.

Bo Li turned around to hear Yao Yuan say, in a heartfelt manner, "I want you know that your hard work doesn't go unnoticed, so... thank you."

A minute frown crossed Bo Li's brow. She stared at Yao Yuan seriously. After a long pause, she turned around and said, rather

uncomfortably, "You... are welcome. It's what I want to do. I love the Hope. I'll keep doing what I'm doing even after you're dead."

"Is that so?" Yao Yuan smiled in spite of himself. He stood up and moved to pat Bo Li on her head. "Either way, I do mean it when I say I appreciate your hard work... Now, please go take a well-deserved sleep. It's going to be a long battle ahead."

Bo Li slapped his hand away and harrumphed. "I'll sleep when I want to. For the record, I hate it when people touch my head, so this is the only time I'll allow it. Never again!" And she stormed out.

Yao Yuan laughed, shaking his head. He returned to his table to greet the mountain of paperwork that awaited him. His heart was as heavy as the stack of files and reports that filled his table. Going through them, he couldn't help but harbor a dream in his heart... Mankind, please get stronger!

On the 9th day from the infiltration, the best friend trio of Xiao Niao, Qiu Qiu, and Dan Dan met up at a park bench somewhere on the third level. Xiao Niao still had his arm in a cast because he had shattered his humerus. Doctors said he had to keep it in an arm sling for at least 4 months for it to fully recover. Then again, in the whole, Xiao Niao had to consider himself lucky because at least he was still alive... "Bro, you must have lost your mind when you rushed in to face the robot. You have to be more careful out there." Qiu Qiu sighed, slapping his friend on his shoulder.

Xiao Niao smiled rather bashfully before saying, "The man died for me, then there was blood everywhere... I can't really explain it."

It's a heat of the moment thing. Then again, didn't your unit face something similar? I heard Dan Dan almost bit the dust!"

Dan Dan stared quietly at the passing crowd. The bag of snacks that usually could be found in his hand was missing. After a while he said, "I'm thinking... It's not so bad being a soldier. At least that way we can protect them from the pain that's written on their faces. Let us work hard to become good soldiers that can safeguard them against sadness. "

There was a heavy solemnity among the passerbys, a reminder that for many, the pain in their hearts was still healing. Xiao Niao suddenly suggested, "How about the 3 of us form a special unit on our own? Needless to say, it's unofficial, but since the 3 of us are Homo Evolutis and have been best pals for so long, we should be able to work seamlessly with one another!"

His friends agreed instantly. Then they started discussing the unit's name.

"How about [Kurosan Ren-sei](#)?"

Tou Qi (头七) is the seventh day after the date of death. It is said the soul of the deceased returned to its body on this day.

San Ren-sei is a starting technique in Go that uses 3 pieces to set up the board. Kuro is the Japanese word for Black to stay in line with the Japanese influenced term. Kurosan Ren-sei refers to the trio unit that's within the bigger Black Star Unit.

Chapter 134: Language

"Attention, area number 2. Operation unit 6 is returning soon, please prepare the hangar for landing!"

The time was now 1 and a half years after the historic infiltration... Most if not all of the Hope's citizens had walked out of the miasma of grief. Life always moves on, and it was no different for life in space. As the saying goes, time heals everything, and its performance was nothing short of a miracle when smoothing over the pain that stemmed from the infiltration.

Death gratuity was handled within a month of the burial. The families that lost their breadwinners were scripted into simple paying jobs and supplemented by monthly welfare. Similar to before, the education and living arrangements of their children and spouses were taken care for by the government.

Sadly, the policy couldn't satisfy everyone, but at least these people had a place to voice their concerns and get heard. Unlike many of Earth's governments, the Hope's government adopted a transparent administrative policy, and under Yao Yuan's watchful eye, there were no cases of authoritarian suppression. Part of the reason any misconduct could easily be detected was also because the Hope was such a small entity.

Therefore, even though the infiltration greatly pained the people, they knew the fault wasn't to be aimed at their government. After all, their captain himself had led the space troopers to deal with the AI. They didn't come back unharmed either. Everyone had suffered losses. Thus, after receiving the

compensation, everyone collectively decided to bury the hatchet and move on.

As the Hope breathed this sigh of relief, the 3 bodies started to mobilize, their main affair being a complete exploration of this junkyard and the absorption of its technology into mankind's own. They were desperate to usher in the 4th industrial revolution!

Yao Yuan, though, had a new philosophy before sending in the space troopers to help with exploration.

He realized that numbers ultimately played a less than significant role in space combat, especially when the technological level was drastically different. Reviewing his combat with the 2 humanoid robots, he concluded sadly that the robots still held the upper hand even though they were grossly outnumbered by the troopers.

Instead, the 2 important factors in space combat were proficiency and weaponry. These 2 would decide the outcome of the battle!

With this philosophy in mind, he introduced more hierarchy into the space troopers. Every 3 Homo Evolutis would be leading a space combat unit, with one of them as the leader, the other 2 sub-leaders. Each leader would lead 9 normal soldiers, and there would be 10 30-man units in total. Therefore, Yao Yuan needed 30 Homo Evolutis... He knew that was a tall order to fill, so he had to put virus X survivors as sub-leaders even though their powers were still latent. However, with their innate grasp of space combat, Yao Yuan was sure they would be proficient soldiers with some training.

This new battalion of space troopers would be led by Yao Yuan. They called themselves the Black Star Troopers and naturally adopted the Black Star Unit's motto as its own: as Black Stars, for victory or for death!

To facilitate a mass exploration, other than the battalion, the Hope needed transport. An increased productivity was thus induced, and the Workshop pushed out a new transport shuttle almost monthly during that 3 month period. These transport shuttles were simplified versions of themselves because their sole aim was to transport about 1,000 people to and from the junkyard. Since it still had to cross the null zone, there was no point installing anti-gravitational and life-support systems. Its passengers would rely on their own spacesuits for survival... After all, the construction of a shuttle each month was made possible only after all these features were dropped!

On the 2nd month after the infiltration, the newly formed Black Star Troopers escorted their first transport shuttle into the junkyard. Even though the AI had been killed and radar showed that there was no longer any robotic activity in the junkyard, the Hope still held its breath in worry, waiting for this exploration and salvage crew to return.

Just to be sure, the Black Star troopers conducted a blanket search across the junkyard and its many husks to make sure there was no longer any danger. 2 months later, the search was complete, and the junkyard was confirmed to be safe!

Finally, the members of the Academy and Workshop could enter

the junkyard and witness the glory of this advanced alien civilization for themselves. They had been begging for this opportunity because only a hands-on approach could truly bring about necessary breakthroughs. This was the fifth month after the infiltration.

So far, the Hope had created 6 transport shuttles, and they were on a 24-hour transport schedule. Almost every scientist, researcher, engineer, and technician had been into the junkyard. They could feel that they were at the cusp of welcoming mankind's 4th industrial revolution!

"This is it! It is as I thought!"

Now, we find ourselves in linguist Thompson Goby's room, where every available surface was covered by tomes and papers. One would be hard-pressed to find a free spot to stand. In the middle of the room, a 60 something man was yelling at the top of his lungs, waving a piece of paper about.

Some time later, the man finally calmed down. His face flushed from excitement, he grabbed hold of the corner of the table for a push to get up. Numb from hours of sitting, his legs gave out and he fell flat against the floor. Undeterred, he pushed himself up and rushed out, screaming, "I've solved it! The language in the music box! I've finally solved it! The alien language, we can finally understand it!"

Ever since the junkyard was open for exploration, the Academy had collected many more alien products, some blowing even the greatest scientists' mind. For example, there was an alien battery

the size of common battery, but it had several tens of thousands of times its voltage! If fully charged, the battery could supply electricity to a flashlight for as long as 30 years!

Other than that, there was also a video-screening apparatus. In the 21st century, mankind was introduced to 3D movies, but the 3D images were mere light shows. Within the junkyard, they found an electromagnetic projector that could produce actual 3D effects, effects that were not limited to projection on a screen but through the arrangement of electromagnetic particles and light, creating 3D images that could be imprinted onto any room! The moment Wa Luo heard about this technology, he approached Yao Yuan, volunteering himself to test it out. He said he had plenty of "action" movies that would be perfect for testing out this new technology...

However, technology was not the same as science!

Technology could inspire advancement in science, but the process was not as straight-forward as one would hope it to be. The technologies needed to be broken down and thoroughly studied before mankind could say they had a total grasp over it.

What the Academy needed were theorems and formulae, the building blocks that form the technology, and not the technology itself!

Sadly, mankind didn't understand the alien language. Even though they had salvaged plenty of reading material from the junkyard, they were all inaccessible due to the language barrier. Without the necessary translation, the books that sat in the

Academy appeared to taunt the scientists day after day. They had a treasure trove of information, but they lacked the key to open it!

The collective rage of the Academy was not one to be seen lightly.

Therefore, a ton of pressure had been set on the group of linguists' shoulders.

Translation was not an easy task though. Translating one human language into another was hard enough. One had to refer to books and experts on both cultures to bridge the cultural gap and language barrier.

If the different cultures on Earth were hard to bridge, the difference in cultures between different alien civilizations was astronomical. For one, they couldn't even tell if this alien race was a mammalian race and as such had jointed tarsals conducive for writing. What if they evolved from bugs, or even plants?

Language is the reservoir of a culture's history. It moves and changes according to its speaker's history. How could mankind begin to translate this alien language if they didn't even understand the history of this alien race?

Then again, not all hope was lost, because among the books, some scientists spotted pages that contained pictures that looked suspiciously like scientific formulae. These pages contained icons that some speculated referred to numerals 0 to 9. After further analysis, it was found that they corresponded to common theories like the Pythagorean Theorem... With side-by-side comparisons,

mankind came up with a cipher to translate the aliens' language.

As time passed, more inputs were added to the cipher until eventually it culminated in Thompson Goby's joyous celebration. Even though only rudimentary, mankind could finally translate and access the alien's knowledge!

Chapter 135: Clarion Call of the Fourth Industrial Revolution!

"...If we study this alien theory, the so-called creator's particle is a type of [superpartner](#)! This superpartner, or sparticle, is the accompanying supersymmetrical particle mentioned in String Theory, and this creator's particle is the basis for the formation of the null zone."

The one standing on the stage was Silewei. His face flushed with excitement, he continued, "According to String Theory, every property of an ordinary particle is determined by the vibrational state of the string. By manipulating the string, these sparticles become antimatter, which, after collision with its corresponding particles, creates [mutual annihilation](#)!

"Of course, this requires the alien race to be able to manipulate the string. This kind of technology... no, this kind of godlike power is simply unbelievable. In any case, the formation of the null zone can now be understood to be caused by a device that forms this creator's particle. Its underlying theories and formulae can be found in page 34, where there are additional details...

"...To conclude, these creator's particles, or antimatter sparticles, are formed by manipulating the string to create antimatter out of an ordinary particle's sparticle. In our case, the antimatter then collides with electrical signals to annihilate one another, creating the null zone.

"Then, how do we defend ourselves against this sparticle? The answer again could be found in the book. Antimatter is rarely

naturally-occurring. Whenever it's formed, the string will neutralize it using vibrations of similar frequency. It is like the cosmos doesn't like the presence of antimatter, which is the reason why is still a great physics mystery! Therefore, to form these antimatter sparticles, one requires a string vibrator, and we've managed to salvage 3 of these still functional vibrators and many more of their parts from the junkyard. They shall be our focus within the next month!"

Yao Yuan exited the conference room with his head spinning. As an expressionless Bo Li crossed in front of him, he stopped her by grabbing onto her shoulder. "Join me for dinner. I have some questions for you," he said, when she finally turned around to stare daggers him.

"...Let go of me first." Bo Li almost yelled after she failed to struggle out of his grip.

Yao Yuan released her with a chuckle. He then walked directly to the canteen, knowing full well that Bo Li would follow. Bo Li sighed inwardly before doing exactly that.

"Are you familiar with the creator's particle?" Yao Yuan asked, while they were on the way there.

Bo Li shrugged. "Of course."

Yao Yuan shook his head, saying, "Looks like the era of dreadnought missiles people are waiting for is still a distance away."

Bo Li continued, in an insolent tone, "The era of dreadnought missiles? I can't believe people still have hope for something as dumb as that. Even a robot era would make more sense than that; are they still living in 20th century Earth? Even then, they would know a giant ass dreadnought is not going to work in combat. They should be looking forward to either an aircraft carrier jet squad that combines both speed and power, or anti-space nuclear-powered space artillery. Dreadnought missile... yeah right."

Yao Yuan retorted, "It's not that hard to believe, really. If we didn't discover this creator's particle, the dreadnought missile might survive the 4th, 5th, or even 6th industrial revolutions. If the target is within range, the missile could take it down in less than a minute. Our current supermagnetic surveillance technology could triangulate coordination in under 10 seconds and lock on in just 1. Using a laser missile, the target could be shot down in just 1 second. Or even better, a Gaussian missile. The recently suggested Gaussian railgun, doesn't it have a purported ability of reaching 50 percent light speed? We could be taking down 1 enemy at every 50 seconds interval, especially when facing an enemy fleet.

"However, the presence of this creator's particle has shoved all of these plans out the window. With the null zone activated, the possibility of long-ranged sniping becomes impossible. They could still snipe us after they have escaped the limit of the null zone, but we would have left using the particle accelerator by then.

"Furthermore, when one is trapped within the null zone, no signal would be able to pass through the signal blockade... This means that even if we had the dreadnought missile, it would be for show, or to torment a young civilization that doesn't have access to

the creator's particle technology, like us before this..."

Bo Li said mischievously, "Still thinking about those robots?"

Yao Yuan laughed bitterly. "Of course. They became scrap metal before we could even retrieve the mini creator's particle isolators inside them. Those mini devices allow their carriers to neutralize the effect of the null zone in a range of 10 centimeter around itself."

Bo Li shrugged. "Yup, they're all waste metal now. I've ordered it so."

Yao Yuan smiled and moved to tousle Bo Li's hair. She turned and leveled at him her death stare, which only made Yao Yuan break up in laughter. "In any case, for every positive, there's its negative. It is the same with the creator's particle vibrator and isolator. One is for offense, another defense. The similarity is that they both exhaust an incredible amount of energy in use. Especially for the isolator, to neutralize the antimatter, it has to keep on producing positive particles to contest the antimatter and balance the charge out. No wonder the robots don't patrol outside of the warship, it's too energy-consuming."

After some reflection, Yao Yuan added, "Now that I think about it, this victory borders on the impossible. Our enemy has a device that neutralizes almost all of our arsenal, an electromagnetic shield that blocks all of our ammo, and an army big enough to run us over like bugs, but somehow we come out victorious. Granted we did suffer a huge loss as well, statistically speaking, we should've been wiped out. Thanks the gods that we somehow pulled through... By the way, how's the data on the controllable polymerized reactor?"

A glint returned to Bo Li's eyes now that they were talking about science. "According to preliminary results, we can definitely create controllable polymerized reactors using the electromagnetic technology to administer hydrogen isotopes, which allows us a degree of control over the reactor's polymerization rate. Regretfully, since our electromagnetic research is also still in its nascent state, the reactor could only be controlled to reach the same level of output as the Hope's current nuclear fission reactor. We still need a few months to reach the level you have in mind."

Yao Yuan waved her off. "Time is not an issue. We've salvaged much supplies from the junkyard, including a great store of [heavy water](#), so don't worry. Plus, we've already been here for almost 1 and a half years; what's another 1 and a half? The key is for us to enter the 4th industrial revolution, only then can we face the wide cosmos head-on... This is too crucial for our survival!"

Bo Li suddenly asked, "Now that I think about it, other than forming the new Black Star Troopers, you've not mentioned the need to create new weaponry in there past 9 months. You know that the complete version of the Gaussian gun is already ready. With an order, my lab could mass produce up to tens of thousands of these weapons using the metal taken from the junkyard. Furthermore, research on the electromagnetic shield is also pretty much finished. Even though we still can't manufacture one big enough to fit the Hope or the shuttles, personal shields that can be attached to the combat suit are entirely possible to make. Not to mention the particle flux accelerator. If we could replace the rocket propellers on the shuttles with corpuscular streams..."

"There's no need to rush." Yao Yuan smiled, interjecting,

"Watching our technology improve on a daily basis, with new theories and technologies popping up every other day as study into the alien reading material goes deeper, it's a wonderful feeling...

"I was not kidding when I said I mean for us to stay for another 1 and a half years here. We need the time to process all that we've collected. There are simply way too many things to complete... weaning off our reliance on rocket fuel to particle flux, fixing creator's particle isolators onto the shuttles, building and fitting the Hope with Gaussian railguns, ambitious plans involving the electromagnetic shields..."

Yao Yuan spread his arms as if welcoming the bright future. "The fourth industrial revolution is going to be based in electromagnetic technology. The one step in scientific progress involves contribution from the fields of energy, superstring theory, genetics, and space tech. It means that we've finally escaped from the confines of a singular solar system and are prepared to take on the whole cosmos. The 4th industrial revolution enables us to do all that... or at least that's what's been written into the alien books, right? According to their history, the 4th industrial revolution was when they truly stepped into an era of cosmic exploration.

"I've heard the clarion call for our 4th industrial revolution, so now is not the time for us to warp! We shall do no such thing to delay its arrival!

"After all, isn't our life expectancy extended to 200-year-olds now? The genetic [mesomeric effect](#) created by electromagnetism has been found to induce anti-aging and increases longevity. Look at Silewei, he's part of the test group, and hasn't his hair been

showing brown roots lately?"

Yao Yuan laughed heartily, adding, "Yes, I can hear the sound of the 4th industrial revolution..."

"And it couldn't have come sooner!"

In the Standard Model, all particles have an accompanying partner particle and they're called superpartners.

In particle physics, annihilation is the process that occurs when a subatomic particle collides with its respective antiparticle to produce other particle and energy. Sometimes the energy from the collision is strong enough to create black holes.

Heavy water or deuterium oxide has high molecular weight. It is used as a moderator of neutrons in nuclear power plants.

The mesomeric effect in chemistry is a property of substituents or functional groups in a chemical compound. The effect is used in a qualitative way and describes the electron withdrawing or releasing properties of substituents based on relevant resonance structures and is symbolized by the letter M. How this technology can be used in genetics is still an unknown so this part is probably made up by the author.

Chapter 136: Space Combat Jet Prototype

003

"Today marks the 1 year anniversary of the Hope's robot infiltration!"

Yao Yuan announced as he inaugurated the Hope's third New Year Party. It was televised all over the ship. His voice could be heard in every corner of the Hope.

"We've been through so much pain and grief, but at the same time, we've held our heads high because we know our families and friends would want us to keep going strong.

"In this past year, the Hope has welcomed more than 8,000 new babies. And in this year too, we have truly experienced what it means to live in space. Yes, it is official. We're officially stepping into our 4th industrial revolution! We can now proudly call ourselves a space civilization!

"I want to take this opportunity to apologize to those affected by my decision two months ago to upgrade the Hope's reactors. There were migrations carried out all over the residential areas of the second floor. Representing the government, I apologize and thank you for your cooperation.

"The upgrade's aim was to improve the existing reactor to become a controllable polymerized reactor. This new reactor is safer, and it exudes less pollution and radiation. Most importantly, by using hydrogen isotopes to create nuclear fission, its output is

more than 10 times its previous version! The plan is to upgrade the remaining 2 reactors so that our warp limit of several hundred times can be increased to tens of thousands more times!

"Furthermore, the element hydrogen is the most common thing in space, so we won't have to worry about running out like how it was with the radioactive ores. As long as the Hope is not seriously damaged, I promise you that the Hope can theoretically maintain a limitless amount of space-warps!"

Here, Yao Yuan paused to let the news sink in. "Other than that, the 4th revolution will also usher in many other improvements. For example, the Academy is working on the computers taken from the junkyard. It was found that they employ electromagnetic hardware. If we can replicate the technology, our computer science field will greatly improve as well. I can already see a few 20 something youngsters in the crowd grinning. Yes, introduction of supermagnetized CPUs and hardware will probably make virtual companions a reality. Of course, this is a rudimentary improvement, so there's still a long way to go before we humans can exist as virtual presences."

Yao Yuan's jab helped lighten the mood greatly. He continued, "Jokes aside, more technologies inspired by the 4th revolution will be continuously revealed in the next 6 months. First would be the upgrade of the Hope's power supply. The nuclear reactor will be changed into a hydrogen polymerized reactor. Following that will be an enhancement on the central mainframe. Supermagnetized chips and processors will be swapped in to replace the outdated parts so its computing power will see a 50 to 100 times increase. With that increase, the Hope can afford to support an additional 2 levels, a basement level underneath level 1, and a level 7 above the

biomes, increasing the total height of the Hope to about 500 meters tall!

"Of course, it'll take at least 1 and a half years to complete a project of this scale. Last but certainly not least, the genetic mesomeric resonator will be available in all main hospitals after the New Year. Just like how it was reported on the news, this device will help increase our life expectancy to about 200 years, and with future technological improvements, this number can only go up!"

At this point, even Yao Yuan could barely contain his excitement. "So, on this date that marks our third year in space, let us rejoice!

"The future is looking brighter and brighter for us humans!"

Even though the event was held on the fifth floor, after he finished, Yao Yuan could hear loud cheers coming from the levels below him. Even the soldiers stationed on the fifth floor couldn't keep themselves from cheering out loud. There was nothing more exciting than personally testing new technology. Mankind had worked tirelessly and sacrificed much to reach this stage, so the pride underlying the joyous cheers couldn't be missed. It was finally time to reap the rewards!

Barbie met him at the bottom of the stage. She smiled and said, "Major, I never knew you were such a good public speaker. You should give more speeches; I'm sure it'll help motivate the public and improve the government's approval ratings."

Yao Yuan smiled kindly. "My speaking skill has nothing to do with it; the news itself is incredibly exciting. The new technologies introduced in the past year almost rivals the total advancement made throughout mankind's own scientific history. Even though many of the technologies are still in the experimental stages and haven't seen public use, the news about the resonator alone would work wonders in hyping the crowd. They're not cheering on my speaking skill but the wonderful results earned by the Hope as a collective."

Barbie smiled brightly in return. She didn't add much but walked silently beside Yao Yuan. Then she took out her notebook. "We have 20 minutes until the meeting to construct a new space combat jet... But if you don't mind me being frank, why are you working on New Years? Major, you deserve a good rest; I'm sure this meeting can be pushed off until after the New Year celebration."

"Let's call it an end-of-year review. After all, the New Year only begins tomorrow, doesn't it? Starting tomorrow, the Hope will have a week-long holiday even though there are still many things waiting to be done. Off the top of my head, there's the reactors upgrade, which requires us to stop the crystal reactors to channel all of the ship's energy to conduct the upgrade. Other than that, the Hope's propulsion system, surveillance radar, and computer system all require necessary updates. The work that needs to be done on the Hope alone will take 1 to 2 years to complete, and we both know these are just tip of the iceberg.

Yao Yuan paused to think before adding, "And we haven't even stopped to consider the other facets of the 4th revolution. For example, the engineering robots Bo Li's group is working on. Using a supermagnetized CPU, these mechanical wonders are slated to

greatly decrease our reliance on human workforce and drastically increase the production rate for all the projects. Barbie, you have to understand that unlike pre-historic revolutions, modern day revolutions are facetious. It is called a revolution because it revolutionizes every aspects of the culture it changes!

"If we hadn't stumbled into this junkyard, we humans would have to work for another 200 years before we could reach our current stage. Furthermore, let's not forget we are now merely toeing the technologies the 4th revolution could bring. There's still a long way to go before we can reach the height of this industrial revolution. That's why every single second is important and shouldn't be wasted."

Yao Yuan stopped to stare at Barbie because he suddenly noticed that something had changed about his secretary... He looked at her up and down before asking, "Your skin seems smoother... Have you used the resonator?"

Barbie's face turned as red as a robin's breast and she coughed lightly. "Major, if I remember correctly, getting teased is not in my job description... Fine, I knew I wouldn't be able to convince you to rest anyway. You always have so many arguments to throw around... By the way, do you have any plans for New Year?"

Yao Yuan was so busy planning for the Hope that he forgot to plan his own holiday. After a long consideration, he confessed, "The week-long holiday? I guess I did forget to schedule anything. But I'm sure something will come up, or I can use the downtime to catch up on my reading. There are many translated alien books sitting on my shelves..."

Barbie knew Yao Yuan was going to start rattling off book titles, so she waved her hands to cut him off early, adding, "In any case, I'm sure you can free one of the days up. I would like to invite you to join me at a ball."

Before Yao Yuan rejected her, she added, "It's more like a gathering for all the government workers. So, as the leader of the government, I'm sure many will hold you responsible if you decide to miss out on such an important function. I know you've given out H-coin bonuses for the New Year, but this is a good opportunity to mingle with and feel out other important authority figures. So, what do you think?"

After weighing the options, Yao Yuan finally said, "I suppose one night of socialization won't hurt."

"Then it's a deal..." Barbie spread into a smile. The woman wasn't old to begin with, but after using the resonator, a youthful glow seemed to radiate from within Barbie. Any man would consider her a catch.

After that, Yao Yuan continued to the meeting. When he arrived, the room was already seated with scientists, engineers, and persons of interest from the Barracks, like the Black Star Unit, Ren Tao, and Xiao Niao. Yao Yuan walked to the podium and began, "Let's cut to the chase. The aim of this meeting is to discuss the new space combat jet. I've seen the blueprint submitted by Prof. Bo Li. This new jet is designed with the technologies of the 4th revolution in mind and is $\frac{1}{5}$ the size of the current shuttle. Its maximum acceleration could reach 340 kilometers per second and

it's armed with Gaussian automatic guns and mini cannons, an electromagnetic shield, and a miniature hydrogen-based engine...

"Using the year as its name, it'll be called Space Combat Jet Prototype 003. We're gathered here today to discuss whether we should start building it now or wait a few years for our technology to be stabilized before we start the project. Now, I'll pass the floor over to Prof. Bo Li."

Chapter 137: A Smile

The conference regretfully didn't reach a satisfactory conclusion. Even though many showed support for the combat jet's capability, they had reservations because they felt the Hope still hadn't had a full grasp over the technologies that would be involved in the jet's creation. Granted, if forced, the jets could be made, but it would require extra resources. But in the end, the contribution-result ratio wouldn't be worth it.

The one point everyone agreed upon though was that sooner or later this combat jet would have to be built. It was necessary to fill the high-mobility and long-ranged combat engine blind spot that was created by the creator's particle. When both sides had access to the technology of the creator's particle, the turn of the battle was going to be decided by skirmishes among combat jets because the main ship would be out of reach, shielded against long-ranged assault.

According to Bo Li's data, it would take at least 1 whole year to finish building one combat jet, and this was not to mention the toll that it would take on the Hope's resource stockpile. To take an example, if the current shuttle was akin to an early dual-vane propeller aircraft, the Space Combat Jet Prototype 003 would be a B2 bomber!

After much back and forth, the agreed upon plan was to build a prototype craft within the next year, and using it as the basic replica, adjust accordingly until the Hope could produce one of these crafts monthly. This was the fastest way to give the Hope an air force fleet.

"...Personally, I'm in favor of your proposal."

After the conference, Yao Yuan waved Bo Li over to join him for tea... He knew tea was the girl's favorite, so he personally steeped a pot for that afternoon.

"It goes without saying that the jet pilots have to be extremely qualified. To that end, I intended to restrict the pilot seat for Homo Evolutis or Virus X survivors. To ensure their total safety, I have no reservation assigning an exorbitant amount of resources to this project."

Yao Yuan sighed. "But sadly, the Hope isn't an isolate expeditionary troop but a home for all remaining human survivors. We not only have to take care of military but also civil affairs. There are updates, renewals, and repairs happening concurrently all over the Hope. We are incredibly understaffed, so it is simply impossible to requisition material or human resources over to build expensive combat jets at the moment. So, Bo Li, I hope you can quickly revise your blueprint to one that we can afford to mass-produce with our current resource levels."

Bo Li sipped her tea quietly, her hands spinning the cup lightly in her palm. She then asked faintly, "Okay... then what features are you willing to lose or downgrade?"

"...We probably can lose the miniature Gaussian cannons. After all, the purpose of these combat jets is to combat other jets, so we would have no need for heavy artillery. In terms of speed, 340

kilometers per second is a bit too fast. The pilot might not even be able to support such an accelerator. Furthermore, maintaining such high speeds would exhaust a great amount of energy, and that would hurt our prospects in drawn out battles, so it is my personal opinion that 100 kilometers per second is more than enough."

Yao Yuan caught himself and laughed. He moved to tousle Bo Li's hair and reprimanded leniently, "Wait, you're the designer, you wouldn't need to worry about these things. Leave them to the engineers, or was that a purposeful entrapment? Either way, I want to apologize again. I'm the one who wanted a high-performance combat jet and told you to start designing one. But in the end, I'm also the one who rejected it, I'm sorry."

Bo Li slapped his hand away and finished her tea. Setting it down haughtily, she said, "That's all, right? I have to return to the lab. You can reach me there if you need anything." Then she stood up to leave.

Suddenly remembering, Yao Yuan added, "Wait, how goes the project to arm the Black Star Troopers?"

After the battle in the junkyard and entering the 4th revolution, Yao Yuan had been meaning to upgrade the troopers' arms. They needed better combat suits, better Gaussian weapons, and more weapon variety that could be used in close-quarters combat or for special purposes, like taking down electromagnetic shields.

Turning around, Bo Li replied, "The combat spacesuit you've asked for proved to be a challenging project. After all, the main purpose of a spacesuit was to survive in space, and it has nothing to

do with combat. So I need more time to come up with a design that could fulfill both purposes. I'm hoping for an exoskeleton-esque body armor technology within the alien books, but we've not come across such technology so far. What we have is technology for electromagnetically welded metal plating, but even with those, we need more time for analysis and experiments.

"In terms of weaponry, testing on long-ranged weapons has been completed. I'll send the reports alongside those on the Gaussian rifles. For close-ranged weapons, we have produced a magnetized saw-blade with 34,000 nanosheet gouging per second. It could easily slice through all currently known materials, including diamond. It also comes with an anti-magnetism structure, so it can theoretically slice through electromagnetic shield. The details will be in the reports I'll send you. Is that all? I have no time for this verbal game."

Impatience was clearly written on Bo Li's face.

Yao Yuan smiled awkwardly as he asked, "Are you free during New Years? I would like to invite you to a ball..."

Bo Li stared at him. "Do you think I'm as free as you?" With that, she sauntered out of the captain's room.

Yao Yuan smiled in spite of himself as he watched Bo Li walk away... Time fast-forwarded to the third day of the New Year holiday and Yao Yuan found himself at the ball. As mentioned by Barbie, the function hosted at a fifth floor open field was well-attended. The food was done buffet-style and plates of meat, cakes, and fruits were served.

Most of the attendees were westerners. Notable ones included committee leaders like Alan and Silewei, who were accompanied by their wives. There were also members from the House of Representatives, the heads of the Hope's many departments, and the head editors from Hope Weekly. Basically every westerner of a certain stature on the Hope was there.

Initially, many weren't slated to be present, but after Barbie purposely dropped hints that Yao Yuan would be there, many changed their RSVP. Some who weren't invited but felt they should have been even came to Barbie asking for an invitation. Unable to reject them, Barbie had no choice but to increase the maximum occupancy. Therefore, when Yao Yuan arrived and saw several hundred people already crowding the field and most of them being influential figures, he was appropriately shocked.

Just as Yao Yuan stepped into the field and accepted a glass of red wine from a waiter, a middle-aged man sauntered over with his wife in tow, asking, "Captain, where's your date?"

As previously mentioned, Yao Yuan had been involved with an international company doing head-hunting work for several years, so he knew the decorum for attending such an event dictated a date. That was why he had invited Bo Li, but now he could only laugh awkwardly in reply. "Representative Anfier, I'm sorry to say, but my date has rejected my invitation."

Stunned by the reply, Anfier chuckled lightly. "Surely you're kidding, Major. If you don't mind me being forward, with a man as responsible and competent as you, if I had a daughter, I would be

asking for a betrothal right about now. I find it hard to believe that a woman would reject your companionship."

"You flatter me, representative." The fact that I would even invite her in the first place I find hard to believe myself, Yao Yuan thought but did not say.

Then he excused himself from the middle-aged representative, attempting to find a quiet spot by the fringe of the ball.

What Yao Yuan failed to understand was that he was the focus of the ball. The crowd followed everywhere he went. His wine glass clinked with the glass of one authority figure after another until the sentence, "Major, I hate to bring this up now, but I feel the next budget for the Department of Industry might be too small. You see..." uttered by the many interchangeable faces brought him back to his life on Earth where traps, lures, and false promises were laid in between verbal exchanges and where everyone wore a perfunctory smile like a mask... To be frank, Yao Yuan felt that maneuvering social gatherings was more tiring than being in actual combat.

After the ball was over, Yao Yuan didn't even have the energy left to complain. On the way out, he crossed path with a half-drunk Barbie. She pulled him in for a hug and slid a solid object into his hand. Then she extricated herself and left. Yao Yuan opened his palm to find a room key... the meaning of the gesture was not lost on Yao Yuan.

Yao Yuan smiled in disbelief before pocketing the key and walking back to his own residential area.

On his way back, a feeling entered his mind, and he changed his direction going towards the fourth floor instead. He saw no one but patrols on this quiet holiday night, so he was curious about who this lonely soul loitering around the Hope instead of celebrating the New Year with family and friends back in the comfort of their own home was.

Yao Yuan's feeling led him to the door of a familiar lab. He saw lights coming out from underneath the closed door. He walked in and sighed. Bo Li was asleep leaning against her table, where a multitude of reports were piling and some spilling down to the floor. Yao Yuan could spot the weapon reports Bo Li mentioned earlier among them.

Yao Yuan stretched his hand out, wanting to stroke her hair, but he caught himself. Sighing, he stripped off his coat and draped it over Bo Li, whispering, "I'm sorry to have killed him... I had no choice; the life of my teammate stood on the line. And before that, on the space station, if I hadn't dispose of him, it would be his family that would have to suffer being used as bargaining chips. Your family could only be saved with him dead..."

"Bo Li, I'm so sorry..."

After Yao Yuan left the lab, Bo Li opened her eyes slowly and caressed the coat on her back and mumbled to no one in particular, "...He had been waiting for death for a long time. Even though he survived the space station, the radiation brought him immense pain day after day. It was a fate worse than death..."

"So... I don't blame you or even hate you."

Tears fell from her eyes. They were caught by the curve of her smile, a warm and gentle smile that she guarded heavily from the public and perhaps even herself...

Chapter 138: Hope Calendar Year 0006

It was the New Year of the Hope's 6th year in space. Everywhere you looked, people were laughing as they went about preparing for the New Year. Wearing clothes newly bought by their parents or given by the government were the children running up and down the Hope with not a care in the world. Their younger siblings still had to be cradled in their parents' arms. The lowest 4 levels on the Hope were decorated with New Year paraphernalia, suffused by an atmosphere of joy.

It has been 4 years since the infiltration, and much has happened within these 4 years.

First, the construction for a basement and the 7th floor was completed. After connecting them to the main ship, life-support and an anti-gravitational system was added. After that, 3 more months were spent to design their layout. Finally, half a year later, the Hope had 8 levels in total. With a height of 500 plus meters and tens of thousands meters in length, the Hope still looked pretty boxy, but with the extra height, it had a more solid look.

Within that same period, the propulsion system for the Hope had changed from the traditional rocket fuel jet apparatus to the new corpuscular stream apparatus. It could reach up to 60 kilometers per second, and if pressed, it could maintain a short burst of speed at 80 kilometers per second!

Not to be overshadowed was the Hope's new defense system. It was updated with an electromagnetic shield and 42 new large Gaussian cannons as secondary turrets. These were heavy weight

weapons that could make quick work of the original the Hope!

However, the scariest addition was the Hope's main cannon!

Placed right in the middle of the Hope, this singular cannon took around 3 months to complete. The construction time would have taken longer if the cannon wasn't built from the main cannon salvaged from the alien battleship.

Officially named the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon, it had a medium-sized polymerized reactor as a power supply and had a 60 second charging time. Despite what its name suggests, it understandably couldn't blast through a whole planet with 1 shot like how it was often portrayed in most sci-fis. Nevertheless, the cannon's initial emission velocity could reach up to 16,400 kilometers per second, meaning its speed was a jaw-breaking 50 percent of light speed!

Even though the bullets were only 120 grams supermagnetic metallic balls, the preserved kinetic energy within each of these balls was almost as powerful as any weapon of mass destruction. As previously mentioned, it couldn't one-shot a planet, but it could definitely bring down satellites with a single shot, so even though the name should be understood in hyperbolic terms, it was also not that far away from the truth.

However, the process that went into constructing this cannon wasn't exactly smooth sailing. Unfamiliarity with the alien's technology had provided many a roadblock, but those were thankfully expediently solved by Bo Li's Whisperer power. If not for Bo Li, it was highly unlikely that the cannon would ever see the

light of day.

Other than that, the Hope's electromagnetic shield was at least 10 times more powerful than a normal shield. Under certain conditions, it could even refract light, meaning it had a certain degree of defense against laser weapon. The newly improved supermagnetic scanning system, if not blocked by the creator's particle, could come up with a rudimentary surveillance result on everything within a 1 light speed area, and a complete scan and lock on for everything within a 1/10 light speed area!

Ever since Yao Yuan's speech on the New Year party 3 years ago, the Hope had seen many new products from the 4th industrial revolution. However, since the Hope wasn't a scientific expedition, most of the new technologies were Hope-focused because the ship's safety was first priority. Therefore, comparatively speaking, public science saw only a few new additions, the notable ones being the genetic mesomeric resonator and a few other devices from the fields of genetic electromagnetism and electromagnetic biology.

Unsurprisingly, most of these new designs were unveiled by Ivan, the Hope's second whisperer. His top expertise in the field of biology was once again showcased when he managed to include electromagnetism into biological research. He introduced new changes to the biomes which greatly increased the harvest rate for many plants. Grains could be harvested every 40 days while the growth rate for luxuries like tea, coffee, cocoa, and hops increased by at least 3 times compared to when it was on Earth!

Theoretically speaking, because the time flow in space and on Earth were completely different because they were affected by

factors like travel speed and gravity, scientists during the 3rd industrial revolution had predicted the growth rate of plants changing in space, they just didn't have the technology to control the rate of change. By manipulating the string, Ivan managed to create supermagnetic fields that were conducive for plant growth. However, even for the alien race, this technology was still new, so Yao Yuan was wary of its usage, ordering Ivan to limit his practice to the biome plants and leave the animals alone.

The 4th industrial revolution was still going, but Yao Yuan knew they were at the end of the initial burst phase. They had reached their limit for understanding the science. What awaited them was in-depth study of new theories or new data, but either way, the result wouldn't be noticeable within the next few years. In other words, the days of exploring the junkyard were reaching their end.

"Team 2 scheduled to return soon, reaching the hangar in 20 seconds. Opening the second airlock..."

Gathered at the bridge, Yao Yuan and a few Barracks authorities sighed in relief. Guang Zhen nodded. "That doesn't look so bad, better than the 2 times before this."

Yao Yuan shook his head. "It's still not good enough. They're familiar but not proficient; I've noticed at least 2 pilots still unable to get used to the high speed."

Ying added, "You're being too harsh on them. These are Virus X survivors. According to the AI, as cosmic adapters, most of them are at Rank C and B with a few among them at Rank A. Of course, they aren't comparable with the Rank S Homo Evolutis, but they

are already good enough to be able to complete these feats."

Yao Yuan frowned. "Looks like the jet still needs to be installed with artificial aid to help the pilot get used to the speed. 150 kilometers per second... is indeed too fast for normal human beings."

This was the start of year 0006. The Hope was in the middle of conducting its third Space Combat Jet Prototype 003 drill. Compared to the previous 2 instances where there had almost been an accident, the pilots had gotten pretty much used to flying the jets, but of course, they still hadn't reached Yao Yuan's expectations.

The combat jet had experienced multiple design changes in the past 3 years. Its original form came into the world 2 years ago. It was a super jet that could reach up to 340 kilometers per second, had Gaussian railguns and miniature Gaussian cannons with 3 seconds charge time, as well as an internal polymerized reactor to support up to 140 hours of continuous combat.

Tweaking had to be done for mass production though. Until today, the combat jet had seen 3 different iterations. The first was the original, which the Hope only had 1 of so far. After that there were the Homo Evolutis jets that could reach up to 200 kilometers per second, armed with Gaussian railguns and miniature Gaussian cannons, a dual-tier high-power electromagnetic device, and upwards of 8 hours combat time. The last was the Virus X survivor jets. Those could reach up to 150 kilometers per second, had Gaussian railguns, a single-tier electromagnetic device, and could maintain a 6 hours combat time.

Of course, with the lowering of features, the price and resource requirement had a significant decrease as well. With the removal of the polymerized reactor alone, the production cost was slashed by 40 percent. With other changes, the final cost for the Homo Evolutis jet was reduced to 1/10 the cost of the original jet, and the cost for the Virus X survivor jet was 1/30 the original cost.

Today, the Hope had 25 Homo Evolutis jets and 120 Virus X survivor jets!

Watching the fleet return to the hangar, Yao Yuan sighed. "You're right. They've given it their best, and I shouldn't forget that before this, they're still normal civilians... I am being a bit too harsh. Let them have a good rest. They've trained hard for 3 months in preparation for this 3rd drill. They deserve a half-month holiday. Well then, we should start discussing our next course of action."

Everyone was stunned, and it was Guang Zhen who came forth and asked, "Ol' Yao, what do you mean by next course of action? Do you mean a fourth drill or a fourth landing operation simulation for Black Star Troopers?"

"Neither, I'm talking about space warp."

Yao Yuan continued seriously, "From my conversations with a few of the top Academy leaders, I was told that we will need at least another 10 to 15 years of study before we can reach the mid-point of the 4th industrial revolution, and another 30 to 50 years

before we can reach the height or the end of the revolution. This has nothing to do with how many alien products we can salvage; the data collected needs time to percolate, that's all. In other words, the Hope is slated to enter the mid-point of the revolution, and in fact, I believe we're extremely close to it. We have the weapons for both space combat and landing invasion, the Hope has seen many upgrades, our agriculture has undergone massive leaps, we have longer life expectancy, and even have access to engineering robots.

"But make no mistake, this is not meant to be our home!"

Yao Yuan announced as he pointed straight at the dark space outside of the window.

"Let's not forget our goal. We're looking for a planet with a blue ocean and open sky, and this is not it!"

"So clear your schedule for a conference on the next space warp!"

Chapter 139: This is Space!

Yao Yuan had been thinking about the warp 6 months prior to his announcement.

The thought was initiated by a sense of lethargy that he felt was spreading through the Hope.

It was not that the people had gotten lazy, it was on the contrary. Everyone worked their hardest, way into the night. Everyone contributed their best!

This lethargy came from another source... complacency. Even since they left Earth, it was a series of disasters, one after another. It was impossible that the citizens didn't get fearful for their lives. Even Yao Yuan had startled himself awake as memories of the past surged into his dreams. He would lie awake in bed for hours on end every time after such nightmares.

If even Yao Yuan was exposed to such frights, it would be worse for the normal civilians.

Therefore, this period of relative peace had ushered in a sense of contentment all over the Hope. Even though they were still surrounded by an empty space, at least they knew there weren't monsters lurking behind the darkness, because the area had been thoroughly patrolled by the Hope's troops.

A small segment of the Hope even expressed the willingness to stay forever, while the majority wanted the Hope to stay longer, to

wait until they went through the 4th industrial revolution and maybe even entered the 5th... But was that even feasible?!

Mankind's life expectancy was only between 150 and 200 years!

Of this current generation, a majority of the citizens were in their 30s, while authority figures like Alan and Silewei were in their 60s or 70s. Theoretically speaking, they could live for another 100 years, but could mankind feasibly step into the 5th industrial revolution in the next hundred years?!

Obviously, the answer was no! Mankind could barely step into the 4th revolution in the next 200 years if they hadn't come across the junkyard!

According to the records siphoned from the alien battleship's mainframe, this alien race had been surviving in space for at least 1,700 years before they met their end!

Within the records was also the mention of their encounter with a small alien spaceship that teetered between the 4th and 5th revolution. The strangers announced themselves as space-travelling merchants who dealt with technology, materials, and information trading. According to the records, the merchants had been stuck at the end of their 4th revolution for almost 10,000 years! Their spaceship engine, even though of fifth revolution quality, was traded from another civilization!

Based on their many observations, the alien race that ended up in the junkyard came to the conclusion that since every revolution

after the 4th was going to be ground-breaking , it would be incredibly difficult to start a new revolution. They themselves were the perfect example because when they left their home planet, they were already in their 4th revolution, and even before they perished, they were still stuck in the same revolution!

Nevertheless, there was another set of data that pushed Yao Yuan into deciding on a space warp.

This data revealed detailed information about the Homo Evolutis, or as they called it, Cosmic Adapters. According to their historical data, when they left their home planet, there were 14 Adapters, among them 1 Perceptor, 1 Diviner, and 1 Soul-Web User. It was this trio that helped them overcome many troubles and enabled them to survive for as long as 1,700 years in space!

But as time passed and more generations were born in the spaceship and deprived of the embrace of the blue oceans and emerald skies of their home planet, the number of adapters gradually started to fall off. The last known Adapter, a Whisperer, died 900 years ago, and when they met the space merchants 600 years after that, they were left with 2 Adapters, but neither of them had any observable powers... Regardless, the space merchants were willing to trade the 2 Adapters for 2 technologies from the fifth revolution. Obviously, the Adapter served a necessary value in space travel. Perhaps they had a surprising use during the 6th or 7th revolutions, but that usage was an unknown even for the alien race.

After compiling all this information, Yao Yuan had a long meeting with the Academy. They came up with the conclusion that

after a civilization left their home planet, the lesser their technology and the greater their inability to adapt to the space environment, the higher the chance Homo Evolutis would be born.

As they got familiar to life in space, the need to adapt would naturally decrease. Unless there was stimulation from great events, like war or societal reformation, every civilization would reach its eventual technological stagnation. However, unless faced with an outside threat, these events would not happen organically in space. And for war, at least one side was bound to fall, another reason why the cosmos was such a harsh place.

Because of all these reasons, Yao Yuan had to space warp instead of waiting for them to move further into the 4th revolution. Currently, the citizens of the Hope still had memories of Earth fresh in their minds, and there were plenty of documentaries available for those that wished to reminisce about their home planet, but could this visceral yearning for home be maintained across 2 or 3 generations?

If they were to stay, they would be walking the same path travelled by the alien civilization they had been plundering from.

Yao Yuan would not allow that to happen!

Riding on the fever of the 4th revolution, Yao Yuan felt this was the perfect time to venture further into the cosmos, to further their minds and to unlock the mysteries of space. This would help collect information to lay a firm foundation to welcome the Hope's 5th revolution!

Based on the data taken from the alien race which they had previously bought from the merchants, space civilizations could be ranked into levels according to their technological level. Civilizations prior to the 3rd revolution are level 1, or primeval civilizations. They are at the satellite stage and they have no usable spaceships nor the ability to terraform planets.

Level 2 civilizations have command over the creator's particle and are in their 4th revolution. They are able to build bases on terrestrial planets as pit stops during space travel. Thanks to the long-ranged defense offered by the creator's particle, to a small degree, they are not easy pickings for even level 3 or 4 civilizations.

Level 3 civilizations are at the cusp of entering the 5th revolution. Their spaceships have the technology to travel at superlight speed, but they can't solve technical issues like the great energy drain compounded during curvature navigation.

Level 4 civilizations are rare in space, or they are just elusive enough to avoid detection by the space merchants. They have perfectly mastered the technologies offered by the 5th revolution and have conducted early trials of wormhole technology. Their technology isn't stable enough to create star gates, but they already have access to humanoid robotics!

Level 5 civilizations and above are an unknown, as there are no known records for them.

Other than these descriptions, Yao Yuan also found a space law

that dictated that level 4 and 5 civilizations have absolute control over level 2 and 3 civilizations. The more advanced civilizations are allowed to raid and capture all Cosmic Adapters and less than 50 percent of the lower civilizations' total population without any compensation!

Failure to follow this law will lead to... annihilation!

All of this information was kept in the Hope's top secret files folder, buried deep within the ship's mainframe. Without Yao Yuan's permission, no one could have access to them.

Another facet of the cosmos revealed by this data was that space was not as lonely as Yao Yuan thought. The reason it only appeared that way was because they had escaped to space without the necessary preparations. Things would have turned out completely different if they had run into any sentient alien race with the intention to harm!

This, therefore, became a case of the more you know, the more there was for you to be afraid of. Yao Yuan, however, wasn't struck by fear. He instead felt the weight of responsibility on his shoulders increasing. His decision alone could cause the downfall of the entire human civilization. There was no time for them to be complacent!

Just as Yao Yuan was deep in discussion about the need to warp with the authorities, a piece of news broke and instantly the decision to warp was made.

"Captain, we've hacked into the battleship's mainframe fragment. A surveillance video was retrieved from within it... it has recorded fully how the fleet was destroyed!

"The enemy was only one spaceship, but it was involved in space warfare that was completely out of the ordinary..."

Yao Yuan saw the video for himself and quickly decided for the Hope to warp. The video fully showcased an eternal truth of the cosmos... the weak are nothing but toys or inconveniences in the eyes of the strong, and the will is never with the weak because they wouldn't even have the chance to run!

Chapter 140: Super Civilization... Space Warp!

The alien battleship's mainframe had been so completely destroyed that even after 4 whole months of scouring the junkyard, they couldn't find a relatively intact piece. Regardless, by pooling together the many pieces that they did find, the Hope had gotten much valuable information, like space knowledge, from them.

A single piece, though, proved to be an isolated case. It had grown a nascent AI and couldn't be cracked using conventional method. There was suggestion of using forceful hacking, but that was quickly shot down for fear of damaging the information locked within.

Therefore, to procure this information, a task force had been set up to unlock it. It wasn't until the Hope's own mainframe had been updated with supermagnetic chips that the piece could be cracked.

After the news reached Yao Yuan, he immediately called for important personnel, like the Black Star Unit, Zhang Heng, Ren Tao, Xiao Niao, Bo Li, Ivan, and the like, to gather at a secret conference room. When he arrived, about 100 people were already there, waiting for Yao Yuan to arrive before the start button was pressed.

"Let's begin."

Yao Yuan was eager for the information inside the piece. He only

got more excited when he was told it was a video, because they might be able to see how space wars were fought.

With some buttons pushed, a 3D image was projected in the middle of the room.

Even though this technology hadn't seen public use, the military and scientists were already familiar with supermagnetic 3D imaging technology because it had already been used in their studies and research.

The image showed a giant battleship fleet flying through space. The size of the fleet was bigger than any of them could have imagined! The main battleship alone was more than several thousand kilometers wide and at least 1,000 kilometers tall! It was much bigger than the replica simulated by the Hope's central mainframe!

Around the battleship were thousands upon thousands of warships, some bigger than the Hope itself, the smallest among them only 1/5 the Hope's size. If Earth was going to end by being invaded by alien, this was how mankind imagined the invaders would look like.

Suddenly, several kilometers ahead of the fleet appeared a warped, concentrated cloud of darkness... It was like the space had become liquefied and started swirling, the ripples sending splashes of... space into space. The moment the warships at the forefront touched the ripples, they exploded.

And then the video got cut off and the room was plummeted into darkness. Nobody spoke, but everyone knew the creator's particle had been unleashed, and that had affected the video recording.

After a while, the video came back online, but the camera angle had changed. This new section of the video was shot from a 1st person angle, and from the multiple screens and sonar readings shown, it would appear that the video was taped in the battleship's surveillance room.

In front of them was a silver streamline spaceship. It was hard to tell what the spaceship was made of, but its surface kept on rippling like mercury. Instead of solid metal, it had the appearance of liquid silver. Because of that, it gave the impression that it was constantly changing its shape.

The spaceship was not big, it was only several thousand meters wide and tall.

A small, armless jet flew towards the silver spaceship obviously an attempt at brokering peace. The silver spaceship gave no visible response, but in a layer of 10 kilometers around it, one could see ions colliding into one another with the naked eye. This was the result of both creator's particles coming into contact with one another.

Right then, the silver spaceship opened to release a wiggling, metallic blob. The blob had a diameter of only 10 meters, probably something to intercept the armless jet... but wait!

Surprising everyone, the blob coalesced into a 4 eyed, winged humanoid robot with 2 arms and 2 legs!

In the next second, the robot leaped through at least about 100 giant warships, and in his trail was a series of explosions.

"No, it didn't warp. It's a wormhole technology, far lesser than space warp, not even to the level of space gate..."

Bo Li offered in a whisper, reading the question on Yao Yuan's face.

Yao Yuan nodded in thanks.

What happened next could only be described as a massacre!

A total massacre!

The robot evaded deftly around all the weapons leveled at it. The robots, including those spidery robots that were such a headache for Yao Yuan, turned against their creators the moment they were within 5 kilometers of the robot.

The electromagnetic shield was useless against the robot; it phased through it like it was nothing. Without even revealing its weapons, it basically shot through the lines of warships like they were marks at target practice, which, in a way, they were. In just 50 seconds, other than the main battleship, everything else floated about in shambles!

Then the robot flew into the battleship and exited several seconds later. Behind him was a trail of aliens.

The alien looked like an amalgamation between shellfish and human. They had basic features like mouths and eyes, but their eyes were as bulgy as a fly's and were 5 times the size of humans'. Half of their bodies were occupied by an overgrown brain, and around their bodies was a shell-like exoskeleton. Other than the pair of hands and legs, their upper body also showed an extension of multiple tentacles.

The aliens appeared to be lassoed by an invisible rope, and this rope also helped protect them from direct exposure to vacuum space. Tied by the lasso, the aliens formed a long string as they were swallowed by the silver spaceship. The whole eerie procession took about half an hour to complete.

"There are at least 200,000,000 of them... How could they possibly fit in that spaceship? A space folding technology?" Bo Li asked.

No one answered. They were still stunned by what they had just witnessed. This was an alien fleet that could demolish Earth in a day, but they had just been destroyed by a robot blob... It was... After the trail of aliens were completely consumed by the spaceship, the robot showed itself again. Melting into a silvery band, it sailed around the damaged fleet in an incredible speed and brought out another trail of aliens, but this time, the aliens were all dead. This continued for another stretch of time until it appeared once more. It lifted a finger and aimed it at the alien

battleship. Several seconds later, a ray of silvery light shot towards it.

Even though the silvery, ionic ray was extremely thin, the moment it hit the battleship, the ship shattered into pieces, the bigger pieces among them disintegrating into nothingness... Shattering was not the perfect description because it was more like the ray made its center disappear, and without the central anchor, everything else drifted away on their own.

After completing its task, the robot returned to the silver spaceship. Then, a wormhole appeared to swallow the spaceship... The video ended to a room of silence. Everyone held different expressions, but be it shock, disappointment or alarm, there was an undercurrent of fear.

"Is that the end?" Yao Yuan rubbed his eyes before standing up to ask the technician.

After checking, the technician replied, "That's the end of the reel."

Yao Yuan nodded before turning around to face the room. "This video will be accepted as one of the Hope's grade 1 classified subjects. I'm sure everyone is familiar with this clauses, so I won't repeat them here. I only have one question to ask...

"Would the Hope have enough time to warp away if we were attacked by this liquid spaceship?"

Yao Yuan sat down to wait patiently as the scientists started their calculations. After some time, a researcher stood up. "I'm sorry, Captain, but the time taken by the spaceship to fully appear from the wormhole was less than 5 seconds. If the creator's particles device is not activated within these 5 seconds, we'll be taken down by long-ranged artillery in less than 2 seconds. With the device activated, there would be an interval of about 10 seconds before the robot is deployed, but since the Hope is only a singular ship, we would be an obvious target, so there wouldn't even be time for us to warp..."

"Is that so? We wouldn't even be able to run?"

Yao Yuan collected himself and ordered, "I request all units to return to the Hope. The junkyard exploration operation will be ending in the next 3 days..."

" In 3 days, the Hope will initiate space warp!"

Chapter 141: Warping

The Hope was already done preparing for its next warp.

They had stayed at this same spot for several years, and those years weren't spent idling . This was the period when mankind truly became a space civilization, when mankind gained the ability to flourish in space.

For many, the Hope was a completely different entity from the Hope of 6 years ago. In fact, if they were to return to Earth now, the Hope would not be a last desperate measure at escape but an armored spaceship competent enough to blow up Earth itself!

And the Hope wouldn't even need to land! By activating the creator's particle, mankind's technology would be undone just like that!

In other words, the Hope had finally come into the title of a spaceship, and not a just a metallic casing ferrying humans through space.

Of course, other than these physical changes, mankind's knowledge about the cosmos had a drastic increase too, and they had learned one cruel yet eternal truth about the cosmos.

There was no peace in space!

Even if there was a time of peace, it was a precarious peace

between two equally powerful civilizations, like the short encounter between the junkyard civilization and the space merchants. It was a peace brokered upon trade and profit because God knows things wouldn't end well for that pair of Cosmic Adapters traded away by the junkyard civilization.

After the designated 3 days, all of the operational units had returned to the Hope, carrying resources from the junkyard with them. There was such a great salvage that empty residences had to be converted to warehouses to store metallic tablets, heavy water, chemicals, and solid hydrogen oxides... These hydrogen oxides were the alien civilization's way of effectively storing a huge amount of water. Stored in their solid state, the hydrogen oxides had a smaller volume when compared to liquid or gaseous hydrogen and oxygen of similar mass. They stored well in this state and could be broken down and compounded into water, hydrogen (for the reactor), and oxygen (for mankind) when necessary.

These resources filled the Hope, and their amount was 8 times the amount they had when they left Earth!

Of course, this couldn't be accorded to the additional supplies alone. The 8 times increase also accounted for the added weight coming from the new metallic armor added to the Hope's surface and the 2 additional layers that had been added to the Hope.

Other than that, the Academy had come forth with a crazy proposal. They wanted the Hope to add an additional 8th level, a level that would be longer and wider than the Hope itself to house an electromagnetic large hadron collider that would be used to

study the theories that would be later revealed as their technology continued to improve. The scientists swore that without the collider, it would be impossible for the Hope to dream of entering the fifth revolution!

Yao Yuan rejected their proposal outright!

Yao Yuan had seen for himself the broken pieces of such hadron colliders during his expedition into the alien battleship. Even though they weren't intact, pieces of them were already $\frac{1}{4}$ the size of the whole battleship. In other words, the collider would be larger than the Hope itself! It was preposterous!

In any case, the junkyard had supplied the Hope with more than enough supplies, and it was finally time to bid it farewell. At the late evening of the fateful day, many gathered by the window, looking at the junkyard, praying. There were tears because this was the graveyard for their many families and friends.

Then, space warps... Coordination, the nearest space body to the Hope was about 40 light-years away... Coordination, 20 light-years... Coordination, 26 light-years... Coordination, 9 light-years... Coordination, not in any galaxy... The external cabin came in and out of the Hope as it warped, and because the Hope could warp more than 10,000 times and could survive for more than 1,000 years without stopping, they only stopped for 1 day after every warp for the purpose of cartography.

Just like that, in 2 months alone, there were more than 60 warps... Staring at the game over screen of Starcraft 3, Xiao Niao sighed. "This is just ridiculous. Ever since we watched the video on

the destruction of the battleship fleet, this game has gotten more and more unreal for me."

Qiu Qiu and Dan Dan beside him though were happily enjoying the game. Qiu Qiu even reprimanded him, "Why are you being so serious? This is just a game after all. Plus, if you put the events from that video in this game, wouldn't that make this even more unreal? Reality's often stranger than fiction, man."

Xiao Niao sighed audibly. "It is unreal, alright. No one expected a robot, an incredibly powerful one at that. It was not even a war. It took the robot less than an hour to completely wipe out a civilization."

While munching on a bag of chips, Dan Dan asked, "Now that you mention it, why is the presence of a robot such a surprise? You, the scientists, and even the captain seemed so taken aback when the thing changed into a robot. But shouldn't that be expected? All of the greatest weapons in movies and anime are robots."

"...It's improbable." Xiao Niao continued, with obvious frustration, "First of all, shapes or forms have no meaning in a vacuum. There is not air or gravitational resistance, so the technology can take on any shapes it wants. With their technology, this civilization could very well not design a humanoid robot, and in fact, just a sphere might even be better. Think about it, which would fare better in space combat, a ball or a robot? A ball has a smaller size and can fire out bullets from all sides. A humanoid robot, on the other hand, would be hampered by its two hands because that would be where the weaponry was concentrated. You could argue that it could open up its body to reveal more weapons,

but in that case, what's its difference from a ball? Why go through the added trouble?"

Qiu Qiu thought and retorted, "You mentioned arms, right? That gives the robot an upper hand in close combat."

Xiao Niao snorted. "Based on the aliens' technology, if they had gone with a sphere, the sphere could have easily extended into multiple arms. Who would have the upper hand in close combat then? If you're thinking the humanoid robot is meant for ground combat where gravity plays a role, then wouldn't a spidery robot makes more sense? Or one of those that have a track frame. No matter how you see it, a humanoid robot is not the best choice for a combative role.

Finally, let's just say the race is particular about the humanoid shape, they're in love with it, but they still need to consider the most crucial element: its control system."

Xiao Niao paused to look his friends in their eyes. "You 2 are also Homo Evolutis. Let me ask you a question: when you first piloted the Space Combat Jet, didn't it feel like it was a bit hard to control?"

After the pair nodded, Xiao Niao quickly added, "That's right. Now a humanoid robot is more than controlling its direction and weapons, the pilot has to take care of its 4 appendages and so much more. Do you think a simple combat stick could manage so many nuances? And let's say it can; does mankind have such perfect hand-eye coordination to master it? The answer is a big no! On the battlefield, a misstep could mean death! So it is highly improbable

that a humanoid robot would appear in space combat."

His friends were speechless, overwhelmed by his argument, but after some time, Qiu Qiu asked, "Then why did that civilization go with a humanoid robot? Could it be a pilotless AI?"

"...A cybernetic cerebral linking matrix."

Suddenly, this phrase appeared on the trio's pc screens. Unbeknownst to them, the player ZERO had entered their server, and it was ZERO that had sent over this phrase.

Xiao Niao turned his body around to peer out of their private room before replying, "Please, Noob, this is not something to joke about. What cybernetic cerebral linking matrix? You've watched too much sci-fi."

"I'm not a noob, and my answer is correct. Might I add, the Zerg is not correctly portrayed by this game!"

Xiao Niao laughed insolently. His mean streak surfacing, he typed, "Then, Noob, what is the real Zerg like?"

"...To be precise, the Zerg should be called a genetically stress-mutated alien race, a race without a fixed set of DNA, a group of hive-like organisms that are formed by an accumulation of bacteria. The whole race shares a unified purpose, and they are the second greediest race in the cosmos. Their current technology level is unknown, but based on their growth rate and ability to absorb

technology, the safest extrapolation puts them at the rank of a Level 9 civilization..."

Xiao Niao laughed even louder, inputting his retort before ZERO could finish typing. "Hey, Noob, it's time for your medicine."

"...What medicine?"

"Your mental medicine of course, LOL"

"...I swear I'll let you witness this Zerg with your own eyes... And I'm not a noob! I'm not on mental meds!"

After that, ZERO disconnected...

Chapter 142: Underground

Of course, Xiao Niao didn't think much of ZERO and his so-called promise. He spent the few days after the encounter playing or training.

The Hope was starting another warp on the 5th day after the weird encounter. Space-warping had lost its novelty though because the Hope had been through it literally hundreds of times. The initial worry that everyone seemed to struggle with was gone. Even if the warp was to cause their deaths, like, for example, warping into a black hole, the Hope would see its end in a matter of seconds, and since there was nothing they could do to prevent that from coming, worrying about it would be futile.

Just like that, everyone carried on with their lives like normal, and sometimes normalcy was all a civilization could pray for. With the introduction of new agricultural and farming technologies, for the first time, there was a surplus of food items on the market. These sort of things might seem negligible, but they actually have a deep impact on the citizen's morale. For example, the doomsday rumors had stopped completely.

During this new warp... the Hope was suddenly shaken by a huge tremor. Things toppled over and they included important lab apparatuses. Thankfully, it was approaching dusk when this happened, so the amount of labs still working and thus seriously affected was small. Regardless, thanks to the store of flammable materials stored in most labs, many labs burst into flames, drowning the Academy in a cacophony of sirens.

The 4 levels below the Academy were equally chaotic. No one truly knew what was happening, but everyone found it difficult to be calm, because such a violent quake hadn't followed a space warp before. Many naturally turned to the worst scenario possible.

And the fear spread from one to another like a disease.

Yao Yuan was in central command when the quake hit. People fell alongside the non-stationery items, crashing into one another. Yao Yuan was the first to stand up, yelling, "Activate the supermagnetic radar, and I want a damage report on the Hope, stat. What's happening?!"

He looked outside the window, and it was a world of darkness. However, it was not the heavy darkness like the one associated with space, but darkness with a brown, gradient-like... soil?

Before Yao Yuan could make heads or tails of it, the radar had completed its initial sweep, and a 3-D image was projected in the room.

On the image, a long, box-shaped spaceship was stuck in the middle of a rock layer. This rock layer was incredibly compact, as there were few observable cracks. Zooming in, it appeared like... the Hope was stuck in the underground of a terrestrial planet!

"...We've warped into the middle of a planet? Then how are we still alive?" a shocked Yao Yuan asked around, but none could give him an answer.

At around 8 PM, Yao Yuan arrived at a conference room where many related personnel had already gathered. Without wasting any time, Yao Yuan strode to the podium and began, "I'm sure everyone has already familiarized themselves with the situation. It would appear that the Hope has again found itself in a troubled position. We've warped into the underground of a terrestrial planet. According to the reports by the geologists, this rock layer doesn't show any indication of it being hollow prior to the Hope's arrival, but for some reason a space that perfectly matches the Hope's shape was taken out just before we appeared here. You've heard right, the perfect size, the Hope fits into this cavity perfectly, with zero budging space!"

Right then, the 3D image appeared behind Yao Yuan. It certified what Yao Yuan was saying.

"I want to know why, two whys to be precise. First, why are we still alive? According to the warnings from the Academy, if we warped into a solid object, there could be complications within the molecular structure, so why hadn't that happened? Secondly, the Academy told me we can't warp right now. Why is that so?"

Yao Yuan then looked down the stage, waiting for people to answer.

Then someone pressed the 'speech' button, wishing to speak. "Captain, I believe I can answer the first question. First, we have to realize that the Hope's space-warping technology is a future-tech that we still don't fully understand yet. Unlike wormholes or star gates, it's a technology that is conceptually different... The opinion of my team is that during the process, there's a matter

displacement of some sort. In other words, if we're warping from spot A, the original matter at spot B, no matter what it is, will be displaced to Spot A. That's the only logical explanation as to why we're still alive even though we should theoretically be crushed within the rock layer."

Yao Yuan nodded. "I understand that there needs to be more breakthroughs in the school of physics before this question can be fully answered, but your explanation does sound valid. Then, what about question 2? Why can't we warp again? Do you know how deep into the ground the Hope is now? Based on the radar sweep, we're 4,000 meters underground. This means that to surface, we'll need to dig a several dozen thousand by 4,000 meters hole!

"The crust of this planet consists of mostly rock layers, and near the surface, clay and soil. Even with the aid of the engineering and worker robots, we would need at least a year of digging to get to the surface. And let's not forget about the danger of collapse! We're not lacking in supplies, so I'd rather miss out the opportunity of an adventure or surveillance than let any unnecessary harm come to the Hope!"

Right then, another person pressed the 'speech' button. The name that appeared on the panel was Bo Li. Her clear voice rang through the room. "The reason we can't warp is mass and gravity... Haven't you considered that? Think about it, why must the Hope be away from any cosmic entity when we decide to warp? That's because space warping might be destabilized by gravity. That aside, everything that's attached will be brought along during warp. Do you seriously think the Hope could possibly warp with the whole planet attached to it? That's not going to happen even if you add another 100 polymerized reactors!"

Yao Yuan was already used to Bo Li's insolent tone, so he merely frowned before replying, "But digging our way up is not going to work either. The geologists told me that if we were to dig upwards, there's a 30 percent chance that there'll be landslide. Because of the Hope's elongated structure, the extra weight could easily snap the ship in half. The electromagnetic shield is useless here too because the soil isn't metallic! Considering everything, is it possible for us to dig around the Hope, to isolate it from the soil layer, and then warp?"

No one pressed the button, but everyone was discussing amongst themselves.

Suddenly, a few military officers barged into the room, went up the stage, and whispered into Yao Yuan's ear. An expression of disbelief spread through Yao Yuan's features. He nodded his thanks at the officers and then spoke into the microphone. "Everyone, there has been a new update... Help me put up a video, this is something you need to see for yourselves..."

A 3-D image appeared in the room. Then it started to zoom out. From the Hope, the video moved closer and closer to the surface, 2,000 meters, 1,000 meters, 500 meters, 300 meters... When the video broke through the confines of the earth crust, the view that greeted everyone was that of a verdant field. Some distance away were even a copses of fern-like trees and dinosaur-looking scaly animals that were 5 to 6 meters tall. The video kept on zooming out, and finally there was a wide expanse of blue, was that, yes... Ocean!

"Ocean! What about the sky? Let us see the sky!"

A scientist shouted as he sprung up from his seat. Even though he didn't press the button to speak, his excitement spread through the room like a wave. Before long, almost everyone was on their feet, looking at the video like they were in a trance. A picturesque landscape filled with greenery, animals, sea, and a blue sky that stretched endlessly towards the horizon... It was an image that was bursting with life!

Even Yao Yuan couldn't contain his excitement so much so that he felt like his heart was going to jump out of his throat. He felt something stinging his eyes, breaking his composure... Several times he opened his mouth to speak, but no words seemed to come out. After many in the room had broken out in tears, he roared, "Yes, this is a life-preserving planet with a vibrant ecosystem. We've found it, we've finally found it, our next Earth!"

"Dig, the digging shall start tomorrow! If I hear any talks of space warp, they will be shot without question!"

Chapter 143: Fever

Images of the planet they had warped into were published in the Hope Weekly the day after its discovery. Understandably, this had created such a stir in the public that the paper was sold out. To make that happen, every family had to purchase at least 5 copies!

After a long night of analysis, basic information about the planet had been acquired. Of course, they would need more time before a detailed analysis could be done, a task that was compounded by the fact that they were stuck underground.

"Oxygen percentage in the air composition is 29 percent and [carbon dioxide 1 percent](#)? Everything else is similar to Earth's... Is this dangerous?"

Yao Yuan asked the biologists who handed him the report. Among them was Ivan, who answered, "The high percentage of CO₂ shouldn't pose any trouble. As long as people don't commit to extreme activities, there should be no harm other than the planet being warmer than usual."

Knowing how difficult it was to procure such valuable information in their situation, Yao Yuan smiled appreciatively. "That's a relief. Hopefully, the planet isn't a host to some dreadful virus... Then again, even if it is, we must find a way to overcome it. This is a second chance handed to us by God, so we mustn't let it slip away!"

Ivan repaid Yao Yuan's smile. "That's right. I've not seen, much

less touch, the ocean for a long time, so I can't wait to get to the surface."

Yao added, "Your son is in his troublesome stage, isn't he? It's about time he wants to run around freely. Hopefully we can reach the surface soon. I too can't wait to lay my eyes on the blue sky and sea."

The two chatted amiably until the team of biologists had to leave. Even so, the smile didn't leave Yao Yuan's face. He could feel his face muscles cramping from smiling too much for the past 2 days, but he couldn't help himself. It was difficult to not be infected by the sense of mirth all around.

As the saying goes, you'll only treasure it after you lose it. After the loss of Earth, there was no one on the Hope that was not overjoyed by this miraculous find. Yao Yuan shook his head, incredulous about their good fortune. As he settled down to read some paperwork, his secretary, Barbie, barged into the room. Her usually perfectly styled hair was in a disarray as she exclaimed disconcertingly, "Captain, we've been infected by a mysterious virus!"

Outside of the pathology lab, Yao Yuan saw Mitsuda Saburo peering through his microscope while a few assistants bustled about frantically. Without knocking, Yao Yuan entered and demanded, "What's wrong? I heard that there has been a virus infection? When and how did it happen? Wasn't there a strict order that no one was allowed to come into direct contact with the outside minerals?"

Saburo stood up and bowed, "Captain, I'm afraid it's not a virus infection."

"Not an infection?" Yao Yuan asked curiously.

Ever since they realized that this planet housed living organisms, Yao Yuan ordered all of the outside entrances to be on lockdown and set soldiers to guard them. Since there were microorganisms 4,000 meters beneath Earth's crust, who could say things would be different with this planet?

Their experience on Planet Sahara reminded them that the evolution of organisms in space could be wildly different from their history on Earth. An incredibly powerful space plant could be destroyed by Earth's common plant virus after all.

Similarly, mankind's immune system evolved alongside Earth's own strains of unique viruses and bacteria. Therefore, it was foolish to expect man's immune system to be useful across different planets. Yao Yuan knew some viewed this action of his to be overly cautious, but he had no choice because he couldn't risk the possibility of alien bacteria leaking into the Hope!

Therefore, when he heard that there was an infection, his expression immediately dimmed... If someone had really bypassed his many orders to not go outside the Hope and had unwittingly brought an outbreak back to the Hope, that person would suffer a fate worse than death!

His feeling thus took a 180 turn when he heard Saburo say that it

wasn't an infection.

Saburo forced a smile. "Since it's not an infection, then most possibly it's..." Before he could finish, the pathologist collapsed forward. Everyone in the room dropped their work and rushed to their leader's side. They talked over one another, unsure of what to do.

Yao Yuan, however, remained calm and squatted down beside Saburo's repose body. He felt the pathologist's pulse and forehead... "Fever? Homo Evolutis?"

It was too early to tell, because many diseases showed symptoms of fever and faint spells. However, to be safe, Yao Yuan asked for quarantine for Saburo and all the consecutive fever victims.

The victims, on their part, sprang up like mushrooms after a fresh rain. They included Barbie, Zhang Heng's friends Ning Xue and Mao Miao, and a few others from the Black Star close guards, including that female soldier who saved Zhang Heng's life on the meteorite base. In total, there were 160 plus people in quarantine.

The pathological department, of course, didn't stay idle even though their leader, Saburo, was unconscious. However, after diagnosis was done on the patients' samples, the result on the presence of virus came back negative!

At the same time, these patients' brain activity was shown to be 10 times faster than normal as revealed by the CAT scan performed using the latest electromagnetic medical devices. The mesomeric

resonator showed more interesting results. These patients' genetic coding seemed to be evolving.

Because of their internal increased activity, the patients' physical bodies needed extra nutrients to keep up. Thankfully, due to the improvement in medical science, the Hope had packets of nutritional tonics available. The patients were supplied with these tonics almost daily. Thus far, Yao Yuan was sure that the Hope wasn't ravaged by a new virus but instead some of its people were undergoing a new adaptation to life in space. Yao Yuan was unfamiliar with its inner workings, but these people were evolving into a new batch of Homo Evolutis!

(The first set of Homo Evolutis came when the Hope first left Earth. And now it's happening again. Could it have something to do with the discovery of this planet that's similar to Earth...? Or is it something else?) Yao Yuan paused to think. Even though the Hope had access to medical devices from the 4th revolution, all of the results came back negative on accounts of sickness, virus, bacterial, or microbial infection. It was extremely similar to Virus X.

Either way, with this happening, everything else had to be put on halt. Even though they still hadn't fully understood what a Homo Evolutis was, Yao Yuan knew well enough to know that they would be invaluable assets to the Hope. The Whisperers could help the Academy greatly, the Perceptors were the best soldiers, the Diviner was helpful as an alarm, the Seekers were perfect for surveillance, the Anima could invalidate the creator's particle... another All-Rounder would definitely be a welcomed addition, and lastly, a second Deceiver could be kept as an ultimate trump card.

In conclusion, the known Homo Evolutis had already been a great help to the Hope, and there was a possibility of Homo Evolutis emerging with new powers.

Even for the normal Homo Evolutis, who showcased no obvious superhuman skills, they were already exceptional soldiers. Seated in the combat jet, their ability could rival 100 normal jet pilots!

The time between the last patient that was sent into quarantine and the first patient to wake up was 18 days... 1 month and 4 days later, all of the patients were conscious. In total, there were 193 fever patients, and under the aid of the tonics, 172 survived and 21 died.

Another month was given for the patients to recuperate before they were hauled to the Homo Evolutis Faction for analysis. There were 13 new known Homo Evolutis: Saburo was a Whisperer, Barbie was an Anima, Mao Miao was a Diviner, Ning Xue was a Perceptor, and the female soldier who saved Zhang Heng was a Seeker. [The rest were all Survivors!](#)

Sadly, there was no new All-Rounder or Deceiver...

"159 survivors and 13 known Homo Evolutis."

Looking at that line in his report, Yao Yuan had mixed feelings. If mankind had better medical technology during the first Virus X fever, the lives of several hundred people would be saved and there would be more Homo Evolutis around... "Regardless, the truth is that a second batch of Homo Evolutis is here. Then...

The digging operation shall resume tomorrow!"

Carbon dioxide concentration in Earth's atmosphere is only 0.04%, so 1% is considered high.

Homo Evolutis that showcased no observable special skills like Perceptor, Whisperer, and the like are called Survivors. This is because... well, they survived the Fever.

Chapter 144: Army Draft and Excavation

With the arrival of the second batch of Homo Evolutis, the Barracks immediately reared its head. Excluding the Whisperers and women, the amount of able-bodied new Homo Evolutis was 122.

Realizing that this fever might not be an isolated occurrence, the Barracks approached Yao Yuan with an ambitious proposal. They wanted all male Homo Evolutis to be handed compulsory enlistment if they survived Virus X. They wanted this to be part of the Hope's legislation.

This was because Homo Evolutis were natural soldiers, a feature that was perfectly showcased when paired with weaponry from the 4th revolution. The most notable example was the Space Combat Jet Prototype 003.

The Survivors could handle the combat jets with a maximum speed of 150 kilometers per second while other Homo Evolutis could handle 200 kilometers per second. Theoretically, they could still pursue a higher speed if not for the fact that speed was not the only thing one needed to be concerned with while sitting at the pilot's seat. The 4th revolution added many accessory systems to the combat jets, like a ballistics prediction system, a coordinate triangulation system, a natural lock-on system, and a target homing system. Utilizing all of them in tandem to one another required extreme focus. In other words, only Homo Evolutis could pilot these combat jets.

Therefore, for the Barracks, the more Homo Evolutis the Hope's

army had, the better it was. Forgoing the combat jet for a minute, another 4th revolution technology could also help prove how Homo Evolutis were miles above common soldiers.

This technology was the Black Star troopers' standardized combat suit. The spacesuit was created using a thin alloy alien-tech, equipped with high-power electromagnetic non-invasive body matrix and space armor prototype 1. The body matrix included an internal electromagnetic induction system that calibrated the wearer's movement speed using his innate ability. For example, when Yao Yuan put it on, the highest speed he could achieve during combat was up to 400 meters per second!

Even Zhang Heng, who was unfamiliar with combat, could go up to 150 meters per second. That was 3 times the speed possible for normal soldiers!

Even though speed didn't mean everything in combat, it had unequivocally showed the value of Homo Evolutis in combat. It was little wonder why the Barracks wanted to have all the male Homo Evolutis for itself.

Yao Yuan, though, rejected this proposal after careful consideration. For one, it was not necessary that all males must be suited for combat. Their expertise or talent might be more useful off the battlefield. Pushing them into combat might put them in a situation where they could fumble and die in their first battle, thus depriving the Hope of their talent that might shine elsewhere.

Secondly, not all female were unsuitable for combat. Combat drills had shown women to be good jet pilots as well.

Lastly, if the Homo Evolutis were forced into the military, they might grow resentful of the government. If there were people like Xiao Niao, who was initially suspicious of the military in the new batch of Homo Evolutis, being forced into the military could only exacerbate that antagonism.

To conclude, even though the Homo Evolutis were powerful, it didn't necessarily correspond to them having a greater responsibility. The best scenario was for them to volunteer to join the army.

However, Yao Yuan knew a volunteer system couldn't work for the Hope because of their current population number. After consulting a few experts, Yao Yuan decided to roll out an obligatory military service.

If the Hope had several billion people in population, of course a voluntary military service would be a non-issue, but in reality, the Hope only had 130,000 plus adults. For a population this size, there had to be more than 5,000 soldiers to ensure everyone's safety!

But who would volunteer?

Granted, there might be quite a number that would be willing to pick up arms to protect his or her family or out of a sense of loyalty to the Hope.

However, one had to admit that such sentiments were limited to the first generation of Earth escapees. They had been through it all

with the government, so they had forged a sense of loyalty in their common goal of seeking a better future for all human survivors!

The question was... could that loyalty be cultivated across generations? In the far future, when Earth was long forgotten, how many would still willingly join the army to protect its survivors... several thousand... or hundreds?

Therefore, instead of waiting until then, Yao Yuan had decided to introduce an obligatory military service when the public was still in line with the government's philosophy. When there were more people to go around, they could revert to a voluntary service. Yao Yuan believed it was easier for the public to stomach an enlistment policy this way than the other way round.

Thus, Yao Yuan transformed the Hope's military system. First, the obligatory military service was written into the law. Every man in the Hope under the age of 60 was on army reserve duty and could be scripted into the army if necessary. Exception was given to members of the Academy and the Workshop.

Changes were also made to the Homo Evolutis Faction. First, detailed analysis had to be carried out on new and future batches of Homo Evolutis to identify their power before they were conscripted. This was to make sure non-combative Homo Evolutis, like Whisperers and Animas, could be isolated to prepare them for training that would better suit their powers.

For example, the most powerful Anima then, Nian Xi Kong, had been honing her skill in the past few years.

As an Anima who could phase into what the aliens called the "soul web" with just singing, her power could bypass the creator's particle. Information is important on the battlefield, especially when the enemy doesn't expect you to have access to it. Therefore, Xi Kong had become a unique strategic advantage in combat. Her power allowed the troopers to perform simple, coordinated moves in combat despite the confines of the creator's particle.

This was a strategic upper hand that shouldn't be underestimated. Her power could practically give an army from a level 2 civilization an edge over an army from a level 3 civilization and even possibly allow them to emerge victorious.

This was the undisputed power of the Anima, even though she was behind the front lines. With the appearance of the creator's particle, the Anima only became that much more important, giving her allies valuable leverage over the enemy!

The other non-combative Homo Evolutis, the Whisperer, was equally important to the Hope. However, their contribution wasn't made on the battlefield but in the labs. The current 3 Whisperers, Ivan in the field of biology, Bo Li in the field of physics, and now Saburo in the field of pathology, were instrumental to the Academy!

Therefore, Yao Yuan propounded a selective conscription for the Homo Evolutis. Those that could better serve humanity elsewhere were not forced into the army, but the opposite was true for combat-made Homo Evolutis. On that issue, Yao Yuan gave no budging space!

Reorganization of the military took about 10 days, and in that period of time, a great deal of progress had been done in terms of the excavation. For one, the Hope had been dislodged from its surrounding rock layer. Now they needed to continue digging upwards, but of course, they had to solve the biggest issue of a possible landslide first.

"...the experts' opinion is to build more anti-gravitational units."

This was the answer provided by the team of experts when Yao Yuan met up with them.

"Build more anti-gravitational units?" A shocked Yao Yuan continued, "But why? The Hope's anti-gravitational system is not broken. In fact, it is kept on 24/7 to keep the ship afloat."

The leading expert shook his head. "The new units are not meant for the Hope but the rocks currently piled up on top of the Hope."

The experts' solution to the landslide problem was deceptively simple. The threat that the landslide posed was it could crush the Hope with its weight. The reason it would have weight was due to gravity. Therefore, if gravity was taken out of the equation, there would be nothing to worry about.

Yao Yuan paused to give it some thought before saying, "This would be a huge undertaking because you guys have to understand that the Hope's surface area is not small. We would need to create a lot of units to cover such a huge surface. Furthermore, we still

don't fully understand what goes into the inner workings of this technology... And let's not forget the energy that would be needed to keep them activated. You gentlemen surely have given me an interesting solution."

After discussing it with the Bo Li, Yao Yuan decided to adopt their solution. Even though it might eat into the Hope's main power supply, since it could protect the Hope's safety and at the same time allow a quicker excavation by enabling the use of explosives, Yao Yuan decided to go with it because the rewards that awaited them was, to quote Bo Li, "...I would like to see the sky and sea once more. Would you care to join me?"

Chapter 145: A Sense of Danger

The excavation had been going on for about 3 months.

Thanks to the anti-gravitational units, the excavation had seen a tremendous increase in progress. The use of explosives without the fear of landslides sped up the progress by a lot. Today, the Hope was only 2,000 meters away from the surface. They expected there to be 3 more months before the Hope could break through the planet's crust.

Simultaneously, as the Hope got closer to the surface, the better its surveillance became. By this time, almost the whole planet had been fully scanned.

The planet was about 3 times bigger than Earth. One day on this planet lasted 25 percent longer than a day on Earth, while one year passed by slightly faster. Its gravity was 1.2 times greater than that of Earth's. The added pressure might cause light-headedness for the more feeble among the Hope's citizens, but it wouldn't have any effect on the physically fit individuals.

According to their surveillance, the planet was basically a primeval version of Earth when it was still untouched by human hands. Water took up 62 percent of planet's surface, while its land mass was mostly covered by jungle with several isolated pockets of dry deserts. The animals had only evolved to a reptilian stage.

No matter what, based on the surveillance results thus far, the planet was all the people of the Hope could hope for. There was no

need for terra-forming because it was a perfect planet waiting for human colonization!

All of these results were published on Hope Weekly, which only added to the public's hype to get to the surface. There was an increased demand for the excavation to go faster.

Incidentally, Yao Yuan too felt the need to increase excavation speed. However, it wasn't because of the public pressure but because he was feeling restless due to a pervading sense of danger.

He intended to check with Zhang Heng that day. He had asked for Zhang Heng to meet him at his office after lunch even though Zhang Heng already had plans with Ning Xue and Mao Miao. Due to the seriousness of the issue, Yao Yuan demanded Zhang Heng change his plans.

"...The feeling of danger wouldn't disperse. Even though I have no clue what it is pointing towards, I'm sure something awful is going to happen," Yao Yuan confessed as he stared directly at Zhang Heng, waiting for his comment.

Zhang Heng nodded imperceptibly as if confirming Yao Yuan's fear before replying, "...To be honest, I've sensed this danger as well, but it is extremely light and doesn't feel as ominous as it was on the meteorite base. However... the feeling has been getting stronger the closer we get to the planet's surface. A few days ago I saw Saburo's article in the Hope Weekly talking about the possibility of dangerous viruses in this planet's air and his demands for the Hope's public to go through a stringent immunization regime before the Hope opens its doors to the

planet's environment. I can't help but wonder whether my feeling of danger is related to this issue. Then again, since we have to break into the surface no matter what, I didn't bring this up to you."

Yao Yuan paused to think it over before nodding. "I feel the same way. The feeling does get stronger the closer we get to the surface. Perhaps you're right that it's related to the microbes in the air, since the bigger organisms of this planet don't appear to be able to pose any harm to us. In any case, I hope you'll come to me, no matter what I'm doing or where I am, should you feel things changing."

Zhang Heng stood up and saluted. Before he left, Yao Yuan added jokingly, "By the way, who do you actually prefer out of Ning Xue and Mao Miao? I don't remember allowing polygamy on the Hope."

Zhang Heng laughed awkwardly as he scratched his head. "Honestly, they're both fine. One's passionate and affectionate, while the other's meek and gentle. I don't mind either."

"You lucky kid." Yao Yuan smiled as he shook his head. "But keep your hands clean. If anything were to happen, understand that I will always stand on the law's side. We already have one Wa Luo in the Black Star Unit, we don't need another."

The mention of Wa Luo piqued Zhang Heng's interest. He considered himself a member of the Black Star Unit, so he asked, "What's wrong with Wa Luo? I haven't heard anything improper about him from the rest."

Yao Yuan looked left then right, making sure Barbie wasn't in earshot, before whispering, "Let's just say there's a reason why he's known as the team player... if you catch my drift."

"Huh?"

They then had a laugh about it. After Zhang Heng left, Yao Yuan asked to see Saburo. "Professor Mitsuda, I have to know, what is the percentage of the possibility for this planet's microbes to be harmful to human beings? And how fatal would they be if that were the case?" Yao Yuan questioned.

Saburo approached Yao Yuan's table and respectfully accepted the water Yao Yuan offered him. After a sip, he answered, "Captain, it is impossible for me to confirm whether the harmful viruses, if any, would be fatal to human exposure, because that is not how our biology works. Human genomes are wildly different from one another. Every one of us has 23 sets of chromosomes, and even though about 99 percent of them are similar, there are still enough variances between each one of us to ensure a different manifestation of facial features, height, sex, and even life expectancy. Similarly, each one of us has a different immunity system that responds to the threat of viruses differently.

"For example, AIDS. Even though it has no known cure, there have been people who were completely immune to it in the past. They were carriers of the virus without the virus posing any harm to their bodies. In other words, it is impossible for a natural virus to completely wipe out a civilization, because a section of it is bound to gain a resistance against it. The survivors will procreate,

and the gene that is responsible for the immunity will be transferred to future generations, ensuring their survival.

"Therefore, with the right immunization, the virus shouldn't be an issue."

Here, Saburo stood up and bowed. "On that note, I hope Captain will first dispatch a unit to collect the planet's microbial samples before the planet is opened to the public. This will give us time to prepare a vaccine."

Yao Yuan motioned for the professor to sit down, before adding, "Professor, please don't stand on ceremony. So, a dispatch unit, huh?"

After Saburo left, Yao Yuan called Bo Li and the excavation team over. He relayed Saburo's concerns.

"I know this will eat into the excavation progress, but is it possible to first create an opening for a dispatch unit to go up to the surface? This is regarding the safety of our future home, and I will not risk the lives of 18,000 people!"

The few leading engineers glanced at one another before one of them responded, "We could try digging through one of the more fragile spots, but because of the horizontal direction of the project, it is impossible for us to use explosives for fear of damaging the entire structural integrity. Even though the anti-gravitational units can prevent a landslide, that doesn't prevent us from being buried. The layer of debris is still going to end up hovering above

us... This is going to be hard."

Bo Li, who had been silent, suddenly added, "What about a supermagnetic field?"

"Supermagnetic field? What's that?" Yao Yuan asked, as he went through all of the 4th revolution inventions in his mind.

Bo Li narrowed her eyes at Yao Yuan. "I'm sorry, but I remember writing a proposal to build a supermagnetic field generator about 3 months ago. It came back with a giant, red REJECTED stamp, so I thought you were already familiar with the technology."

Yao Yuan laughed awkwardly. "That's because the amount of supplies you asked for was too astronomical. Granted it's more economical than the Hadron Collider, it's not by much. Your proposal said the machine would occupy $\frac{1}{2}$ of a whole level, so how could I possibly approve it? Regardless, what is this supermagnetic field?"

Bo Li rolled her eyes. "This is a technology inspired by my power when I was flipping through the alien scriptures. We will have access to manmade gravity at the end of the 4th revolution, and this supermagnetic field is its byproduct. The supermagnetic field could lock objects within a limited area in stasis. However, it requires a large amount of energy, one not even the polymerized reactors could provide, so this technology hasn't been available to the aliens either. One thing to note is that this technology is different from our anti-gravitational technology; it is much more primitive."

Yao Yuan's interest was raised, so he asked hurriedly, "But how could that help? Are we going to manually remove the debris bit by bit?"

"No, we use something more direct." A mischievous glint flashed in Bo Li's eyes. "With the anti-gravitational units keeping the debris afloat and the supermagnetic field locking it into place...

"We'll blow through it with a shot from the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon! That'll be our ticket to freedom!"

Chapter 146: The First Dispatch Unit

Bo Li's suggestion sounded crazy to say the least.

It was preposterous enough that a supermagnetic field generator needed to be built to essentially open a tunnel, and her plan required the usage of the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon! A weapon strong enough to demolish a medium-sized space satellite with 1 hit!

"I've asked many experts before coming forth with this idea. All of them agree that a shot from the cannon could tear through the suspended 2,000-meter rock layer easily. Furthermore, the shot will have reached enough [third cosmic velocity](#) to break through the atmosphere and perhaps even this solar system to disperse itself in space! There is no harm in doing this!"

Yao Yuan was convinced by her sound argument on one hand and conflicted by the ludicrousness of the situation on the other. In the end, he came to a decision and asked for a meeting among the Black Star space troopers.

"First, I've accepted the plan. It sounds ridiculous, but in reality, the generator only needs 20 days to build. After it has passed the safety check, a shot will be fired by the cannon to create an upward path. Then, a first dispatch unit of about 15 people will take a shuttle to the surface to conduct field study and sampling."

Yao Yuan addressed Ying, "Ying, you'll be leading the team. Bring Zhang Heng and Ren Tao along. Make sure to keep communication

open at all times. In cases of emergency, I'll ask Xi Kong to use her power to reach you. Your team will also consist of 5 scientists and 7 Black Star troopers. Please ensure the safety of these 5 scientists. Among them will be Professor Mitsuda, the Whisperer."

Ying nodded. "What about our equipment? I request for gear that is suitable for a planet with an atmosphere."

"Approved," Yao Yuan answered immediately. "Other than those, I'll allow your unit to carry 1 lightweight Gaussian cannon, and for every one of the members, a supermagnetic guided mine."

Ying felt that there was nothing for him to add, so he nodded satisfactorily.

Then Yao Yuan left the rest to Ying. He had faith in Ying's meticulousness during mission planning, so he didn't drop in to check.

Ying didn't disappoint. Other than Zhang Heng and Ren Tao, who were nominated by Yao Yuan, he picked Ebon and Liu Bai, making the total number of skilled Homo Evolutis to 5. Finally, he picked 5 Survivors to round up the party.

Without being told, Ying understood Yao Yuan's intention. Other than the ostentatious mission objectives, the hidden point of the mission was to provide field training to the Survivors. That was why Ying opted for a 50-50 ratio between the skilled Homo Evolutis and the Survivors, even though the Survivors' ability wasn't as powerful as the other Homo Evolutis'.

With the increased progress brought in by the 4th revolution, the generator that took up 1/2 of the Hope's entire floor was completed within 20 days. Unfortunately, because the machine was too unwieldy to be fitted in the Hope, it had to be attached to the ship's outer wall. This action earned Bo Li's ire, since treating it as an external attachment would mean exposing such delicate equipment to damage.

Yao Yuan, though, paid her no mind. It was, after all, a necessary decision. The thing would occupy a quarter of one of the Hope's individual levels. Putting it inside the Hope would naturally mean sequestering part of the public space. The public ire from that would be worse than the wrath of a single Bo Li. Furthermore, since they were loaded with resources, if the device was damaged, they could just as easily build a new one.

After exhausting a whole polymerized reactor, the generator was activated as plasma visibly surged towards the top of the ship. The floating debris above the Hope slowly gravitated towards the walls and formed a compact, horizontal rock barrier.

As everything set into place, the front of the Hope opened to reveal the barrel, body, and even the rail where the cannon sat on. The cannon slowly pointed upwards and electricity could be felt suffusing the area as it charged up. Electricity could be seen running through coils inside the cannon, creating a plasmatic energy center.

"Starting count down: 30, 29, 28..

3, 2, 1..."

Following the completion of the count down, the whole ship shook. In barely a second, a hole of 50 meters in diameter appeared above the Hope. Several pieces of pebbles broke away from the edge, tumbling downwards. However, the rest of the barrier held. Finally, through the hole, the people of the Hope could see the sky!

The cannon shot would be out of the planet's atmosphere by then, far into the reaches of the cosmos.

Everything was ready, but... the hole was too small for the shuttle to navigate through. In the end, Yao Yuan had no choice but to order 3 more shots. The shots increased the size of the hole to about 170 meters in diameter, and finally the shuttle could squeeze through.

Inside the shuttle, everyone was in their spacesuit. With the anti-gravitational system activated, the shuttle floated slowly through the hole. The shuttle was grazing the walls at every side, but thankfully, with Ying's power, there was no accident. However, due to the difficulties in navigation, it still took the shuttle about 10 minutes to pass through the 2,000-meter-long tunnel.

The moment the shuttle broke through to open air, it felt like they were transported back to Earth.

Beyond the windows was a field of grass where animals galloped away hurriedly, startled by the shuttle's appearance. Ferns of many kinds and colorful flowers dotted the landscape. Clouds

floated lazily up in the sky, pierced occasionally by aviaries of some sort. The sky was awashed in a palette of gold and red, for a sun was setting in the western horizon. It was so... beautiful.

Ying wasted no time enjoying the scenery. Certain of the mission, he found a safe spot to land before leading the troopers out the shuttle. They needed to secure the perimeter. After all, this was an alien planet... even the plants could be dangerous!

20 minutes later, Ying allowed the scientists to descend after making sure there were no obvious signs of danger.

The moment they heard Ying's consent, the group of scientists rushed out of the shuttle with much glee and excitement. Then they spread out to complete their own assignments. Samples were collected from the plants, animal feces, soil, air, and microbes. This was not a project that could be hurried, so even when the sky was fully dark, the sampling process hadn't seen its conclusion yet.

Suddenly, Chou Yue, Mao Miao, Yao Yuan in the Hope and Zhang Heng on the surface lifted their heads upwards and exclaimed in unison, "This is bad. Danger incoming!"

An unknown danger was coming from above them, from way above the planet's surface and even above the sky and atmosphere... it was coming from beyond the planet itself!

What kind of feeling was this?! This was an unbridled malice, intent on swallowing everything... They felt like they were like meat stranded in a circle of hungry beasts!

Zhang Heng's first reaction was to connect to the Hope, Chou Yue went searching for Ren Tao, Mao Miao sought Ning Xue's comfort, and Yao Yuan communicated with Ying immediately.

"Ying, what's happening?! Report immediately! I feel something extremely dangerous coming from beyond the sky! What's happening?"

"The planet... It's being consumed!"

With shock and terror, Ying's party stood transfixed, watching the planet's two moons. One of them had irregular bite marks on its surface. The culprit was a mass of muscles adhering to the moon's surface, slowly digesting it!

The scene was captured in Ying's mind using his seeker's power.

His eyes met the stare of the many eyes that covered the meat monster's massive body. It shifted its gaze away from Ying and to the shuttle behind him... and then to the giant hole beside the shuttle!

The 'third cosmic velocity' is the speed that a spacecraft needs to attain in order to be able to leave the solar system.

Chapter 147: Life? Spaceship?

Suffice to say, the dispatch unit's good mood was entirely ruined by the appearance of the meat monster.

No one had any leisure left to admire the planet's beauty, so they rushed through their mission mechanically.

Their hearts heavy with worry, the dispatch unit returned to the Hope. After the necessary decontamination procedure, the 15-member unit was escorted to a secret meeting where more than 100 attendees were already waiting.

"...These are the results of our surveillance thus far."

Yao Yuan explained from the podium. Behind him was a 3-D image of the planet they were on and its two orbiting moons.

"This planet has 2 moons. To prevent confusion, we shall refer to the first moon as Moon 1. Moon 1 is $\frac{1}{6}$ the size of Earth's moon, and the second moon naturally will be called Moon 2... Then again, rather than a moon, it is more akin to this planet's binary star, as it is only smaller than this planet by 0.17 percent. It has its own atmosphere, terrain, and ecosystem...

"I understand this is hard to believe, especially for the scientists in the room, because scientifically speaking, it is statistically improbable to find a life-supporting planet in space. What's more is that we have stumbled upon a pair of life-supporting binary stars. They orbit around one another, seemingly unaffected by

each other's gravity field. This is indeed a space miracle.

"However!"

The mood of the room changed as Yao Yuan's expression turned grim. "That was not all that we've found! Operator, please post the enlarged image of Moon 2!"

A second later, the original image was swapped out for the zoomed in satellite picture of Moon 2. Using those, a constructed 3-D image of the moon of half a meter in diameter was projected in the middle of room.

The planet's surface still maintained several traces of greenery, but its sea was nothing more than a giant gulf. All of the water had been dried up, and the planet's surface was so arid that it was cleft with cracks. A giant, meat-like pipe of several tens of thousands in diameter encircled the planet's surface. The branching, muscular pipe appeared to be completely welded into the moon, as if it was sucking it dry from within.

The moon's biggest land mass... was covered with an unknown muscular layer, and the pipe appeared to be connected to this layer... "Based on our surveillance data, this muscular layer is about 2,400 meters above sea level and covers $\frac{1}{2}$ of the moon's surface. So far, we have no clue as to this... thing's identity. Is it alive? Is it an alien weapon or a mineral collector like the plant on Planet Sahara? We don't know."

After some minor commotion in the audience, a scientist pressed

the speech button. He requested, "Captain, can you pull up the heat distribution schematics for this creature?"

A surprised Yao Yuan answered, "Of course. Operator, you heard the man."

A military man punched in a few controls and the colors of the 3D image changed. Most of the muscular landmass was in shades of red, orange, and yellow, while the rest of the planet was in blue, signifying its low temperature. Within the muscular landmass, there were 4 notable points that shone with a white light. Those were places of high altitude on the map.

"...According to the data, these 4 spots have a temperature of more than 10,000 degrees with a possible maximum temperature of 100,000 to 1,000,000 degrees..." Yao Yuan read from the numbers that appeared on screen.

More commotion ensued until a scientist stood up and announced, "Captain, we suspect that this is a spaceship!"

Yao Yuan was stunned. He asked hurriedly, "A spaceship? A vehicle to travel through space?"

The scientist nodded. "Yes. As we can see, this unknown object is collecting resources by absorbing it directly from the moon. The materials are siphoned through the pipes to be used as energy reagents. That is the only plausible explanation to why those 4 spots could reach such a high temperature. Those are energy reactors of some sort. Therefore, this is a spaceship we're looking

at."

Right then, another scientist pressed the speech button, asking, "But Professor Peter, why couldn't this be an animal organism? It looks just like one!"

Peter retorted, "Then where could such an organism come from? The fact that there is only 1 such creature on this moon and it has no competition means that it probably didn't originate on this moon. Furthermore, from a biological perspective, an organism with this mass and size can't logically exist!"

Yao Yuan halted the argument by asking, "Sorry to interrupt, but could everyone slow down for a minute? Can someone explain to me what is this origin planet and illogicality that Professor Peter spoke of?"

Ivan stepped forth to answer. "Captain, let me explain. First, venturing in space has broken many of biology's accepted rules. For example, silicon-based and nitrogen-based organisms are no longer stuff of science fiction. However, one biological truth has remained uncontested, and that is the biological need for reproduction.

"Be it through sexual reproduction, asexual reproduction, mitosis, or even other methods that we've not seen before, the aim of reproduction is to ensure an organism's continuity. For continuity to occur, the offspring can't be biologically different from its parent. Such is the iron rule of biology. We see this replicated in every organism that we know; microbes breed microbes and rabbits breed rabbits. It is impossible for microbes to

breed rabbits, as that is just preposterous. Even if there's evolution, it occurs across a long time with the bad genes gradually eliminated by natural selection. Organism A couldn't just become organism B across 1 generation. This should be true for all space organisms, or else there wouldn't be any civilizations or races."

Ivan paused to point at the 3-D landmass. "So if we assume that that thing is a living organism... this means that its previous generation would also be about the same size and mass. Could you envision a planet big enough to support such a group of living organisms? Think about it, the planet would have to be at least 10,000,000 times bigger than this planet! For a planet that size, its gravity would simply doom its inhabitants. Furthermore, the planet would implode upon its gravitational pressure, so logically speaking, such a giant organism is impossible."

Another scientist piped up. "Then couldn't the organism have mutated? Even though I'm not a biologist, I understand mutation can bring some drastic changes."

Ivan replied firmly, "You're right. Under the influence of radiation or other odd circumstances, an organism can undergo dramatic evolutionary changes. That was why Professor Peter has asked for a heat distribution schematics of this thing... My fellow colleague, do you think it is possible for an organism to even evolve to a stage where it can innately learn how to fuse hydrogen to create atomic energy? This is beyond pure biological knowledge, for it involves familiarity with the fields of electromagnetism, atomic energy, and metallurgy to name a few. These are all 4th revolution technologies, but this 'organism' is using them!"

The scientist contemplated for a long time before conceding. "You're right. If that's the case, this 'organism' has to be a spaceship. Perhaps instead of focusing on mechanics and robotics, this alien race has ventured deep into the studies of biology and genetics..."

Yao Yuan waited for them to finish before adding, "So this thing could be an organic spaceship... This means that its owner has crossed into 4th or even 5th revolution by now. We can't eclipse any possibilities at this point. However, the bigger question is, will they cross over to this planet?"

Everyone started arguing amongst themselves again, but no one dared to speak their mind. Regardless of its identity, since it had shown the intention to drain the moon of its resources, then it would be illogical to expect it to leave the other similar planet alone... It would descend upon the planet they were on sooner or later.

"...Since no one can be sure, let's find out more first."

Yao Yuan sighed as he spoke into the communicator. "Fire 10 remote controlled S grade mini AI probes, the ones we salvaged from the junkyard... I want a close-up of this organism within the next 10 minutes!"

Chapter 148: War!

The Hope's military force was highly efficient, so they only had to spend 10 minutes to pull the AI probes from the warehouse. These 10 probes were some of the 50 probes that the Hope had salvaged from the junkyard. Even though mankind could replicate some of the technology used to build the drones, some of the smaller parts required nanotechnology that mankind didn't have access to. Therefore, the 50 drones were extremely valuable, because the replicated models couldn't be as powerful as the originals.

Yao Yuan's determination could be seen from the fact that he had ordered to deploy 10 drones in one go. 10 drones could literally scan the whole solar system they were in with ease. Yao Yuan, in fact, wanted to deploy all 50 drones. After all, this organic spaceship could very well ruin their prospect of finding a second home planet!

10 minutes later, the 10 drones lifted into the air through the open hole. The moment the drones reached the surface, they shot into space. Their speed was so fast that they seared burning trails into the atmosphere.

"Armed with particle accelerators and high-energy electromagnetic batteries, the drones can reach a maximum speed of 1,400 kilometers per second and last for 72 hours. No wonder it's a technology from the 4th revolution."

As Yao Yuan spoke, a 3-D image slowly materialized. Details of Moon 2 became clearer as the drones gently descended onto the

moon, inching closer and closer to the muscular landmass.

"...Detection of high-energy reaction! Energy surging towards the 4 suspected reactors. Energy rising, possible anti-air weapons!"

An urgent voice said through the communicator. Before anyone could respond, the 3-D image blinked out of existence, and barely a beat later, every other surveillance device in the room also started to fail.

"Are we under attack? What kind of attack? Energy weapon? Laser weapon?"

Yao Yuan yelled through the communicator. A hurried response came several seconds later. "No, not a weapon attack, but... creator's particles!"

When they looked out the window, they saw a bright layer of ions clashing with one another, a physical manifestation of creator's particle coming into conflict with the Hope's particle isolator. If this was the Hope prior to the junkyard, all energy would have been lost by now.

Everyone returned to the meeting room with heavy footsteps. The situation was obvious; regardless of whether it was an organism or an organic spaceship, it represented a level 2 civilization since it had access to both polymerized reactors and the creator's particle. Based on these observations, it could be concluded that it was not a simple mutation.

"...As everyone can witness for themselves, all of our surveillance technology has been rendered useless... We have to rely on our eyes to keep watch over this thing... Of course, this is the same for our enemy. The creator's particle has made surveillance impossible for the both of us."

Yao Yuan paused to think before adding, "First, I need Ying to lead the dispatch unit... excluding the scientists of course, back to the surface. I need the 9 of you to keep a close eye on the giant organism. I want you to immediately report back to the Hope the second it tries to do anything, be it flying towards us or it dispatching satellites or things of that sort."

"Mission duration?" Ying stood up to ask.

"...12 hours," Yao Yuan answered. "You and the female black star guard, Ye Mu, are the only seekers we have, so I'll have Ol' Wong bring her to take over after the 12 hours. I'll be relying on you to keep the surveillance active. Dismissed."

Ying saluted. "Yes, Sir!" Then he made eye contact with Zhang Heng, Liu Bia, Ebon, and Ren Tao before leading all 4 of them hastily out of the room.

Yao Yuan then turned to the scientists. "Continue working with the surveillance data we have. Other than that, continue sampling the planet, make sure the excavation continues, and increase the speed if possible. In other words, keep to your stations; we need as much information as we can get... Bo Li, if you can, please stay behind."

The scientists only got more worried after witnessing the meat muscle creature sucking the moon dry. Even without Yao Yuan's urging, they wished to return to their labs to find out more about this unknown organism!

Finally, only Yao Yuan, Bo Li, and a few technical workers were left in the room. Yao Yuan took the opportunity to ask, "Bo Li, you're the designer and creator of our space combat jet and the space troopers' equipment. I wish to ask... Do you think our current equipment is enough to defend the Hope if a war ensues on this planet?"

A slight panic entered Bo Li's eye as she answered, "You really think the monster will descend on this planet? If such a big creature were to fall from space, the only way the Hope could defend itself would be by warping. I don't think an atomic bomb or the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon will be of any use. Yes, they could harm parts of the creature, but due to its great size, the majority of it will remain... unless we manage to destroy 'that' thing."

"Destroy 'that' thing huh?" Yao Yuan smiled ruefully. "If only we had the technology. Regardless, temporarily, at least for the next 5 years... the creature won't come to this planet. Call it the Diviner's intuition, but realistically speaking, it won't be attacking so soon because one, it hasn't completely drained the moon yet, and two, it has to be wary of us suddenly appearing in this planet's underground.

"Therefore, it's my speculation that it'll send out small crafts or

landing crew to test the waters. However, since the creature is already in the 4th revolution, and because of its size, we have to suspect that it'll have a larger population than us... Since we can't prevail in terms of number... I hope we'll at least have the upper hand in terms of quality. That's why I asked you those questions."

"In terms of quality, I don't think we should have anything to worry about. Even though our space combat jet is only the result of the initial stage of 4th revolution and thus pales in comparison to jets that will arise in later revolutions, it won't be completely overwhelmed. It won't be a situation where we're the prehistoric mankind fighting a jet using stone axes," Bo Li offered.

"Furthermore, I think you've missed out on an important detail."

Yao Yuan was stumped. "What detail?"

Bo Li replied, "The Homo Evolutis, obviously. Our number of Homo Evolutis is higher than the junkyard alien civilization, so they had to rely on normal citizens to pilot their warships. Even though the warships had great power, they went unused because of their pilots. Therefore, I can assure you that in terms of quality, as long as we're not seriously outnumbered, we'll be fine. A Homo Evolutis-piloted combat jet could easily take on 10 normally-piloted warships! That much is certain!"

Yao Yuan relaxed only slightly because Bo Li had raised an important point... What if they are seriously outnumbered?

"No matter what, we must try our best to protect this planet! It'll

be impossible to locate another planet that has greenery and a blue sea and sky, a planet that could give us hope! How can we allow it to be consumed by an alien monster?! We will never let that happen! If the worst happens, we'll just reveal our trump card!"

Ying led the 9 member unit up to the surface. They descended the shuttle but knew not to wander 10 meters away from it, because that was the safe zone... the safe zone from the interference of the creator's particle. Even though each of their spacesuits was outfitted with an individual isolator, operating those required a great amount of energy, so they shouldn't be used unless truly necessary.

The time was almost dusk. Moon 2 hung low in the sky, its surface pockmarked with craters and cracks. Like a malign growth, a mass of muscles pulsed on its surface.

"So ugly and disgusting," Ying said snidely.

"This planet shall be mankind's second home planet. We will not allow you to contaminate it!"

Chapter 149: Trump Card

It had been 3 days and 3 nights since the creator's particle was activated.

Within these 3 days, the Hope's public went on with their lives like nothing had happened. They reported to work every morning, gossiped with one another during breaks, and returned home to have dinner with their family after work. Their main topic of conversation was, of course, the Earth-like planet, the planet that they could one day call home.

Hidden from the truth, the public had nothing but anticipation towards rebuilding a life on this new home planet. Their only worry was the virus because that was the only information that was revealed. However, it might be an exaggeration to call it a worry, because at the end of the day, the public had full faith that the government would overcome the problem. After all, technology was improving tremendously right before their eyes. They wouldn't be surprised if the Hope Weekly suddenly announced that the Academy had found a way for mankind to achieve immortality!

In conclusion, the general public on the Hope had high hopes for their future. The remaining pockets that thought otherwise were either hidden doomsday cultists or people who were privy to the truth.

Among those who were in the know, they barely had time to eat in those 3 days. Every waking second was spent researching the meat monster. A combination of fear and hope contributed to a

total of 79 feasible plans for Yao Yuan to choose from!

"They want to create 'that' thing in such a short amount of time? Have they finally lost it? Its key technology hasn't been fully understood, and realizing this plan requires 13.4 times the energy required for a space warp. In other words, we need at least 5 giant polymerized reactors to make this plan work. Do they think we can complete all of this on such short notice?"

Yao Yuan slammed the files on his table. His mental state had been strung taut by the pressure that had accumulated over the past 3 days. If it was someone else, the person would have cracked under pressure by then. Yao Yuan, though, only fumed silently, a testament to his mental stability.

Yao Yuan was not afraid of combat or even death, but he found himself to be apprehensive of the momentous pressure he was placed under.

After all, it was almost miraculous that the Hope had managed to find a perfectly preserved planet with a sustainable environment in its more than a hundred warps after they left Earth!

Blinded by the prospect of a new home, information about this new planet was rashly released through the Hope's media before the organic spaceship was discovered. The public's great desire to see, touch, and feel the new planet for themselves was the source of Yao Yuan's enormous pressure.

Sitting before Yao Yuan was Guang Zhen. He held in his hands

the military's proposed plan. When he saw Yao Yuan fuming, he laughed conciliatorily before pushing the plan forward, adding, "Stop giving yourself so much pressure, Ol' Yao. Our current condition is already more than satisfactory. If not for you, human civilization would've been long gone by now."

Yao Yuan gulped down his cup of tea and sighed audibly. "Ol' Wong, you're right. I've been under a lot of stress lately... But I think you can see why... This planet... this planet is our second chance, so we'll have to protect it no matter what. Do you know that based on the HD pictures taken by Ying and the data collected before the activation of the creator's particle, the Academy has already come up with the speculation that... this organic spaceship spreads via mitosis, like bacteria."

"It spreads?" Guang Zhen was startled.

Yao Yuan nodded. "Yes, it spreads. We've been carrying out 24-hour surveillance on the thing for the past 3 days. The Academy came over with a report this morning. The creature has gotten about 30 meters thinner, but its coverage has gotten wider. You know what this means, right?

"According to their calculations, the creature will have covered the entire moon in the next 30 days, and I believe that after that, it'll definitely find ways to come over to this planet!"

Guang Zhen's face sank, then he asked hurriedly, "Is it possible that the Academy miscalculated? This is a whole planet-sized moon we're talking about. It sounds impossible that it'll be completely digested in just a month!"

Yao Yuan chuckled bitterly. "I had the same suspicion, so I purposely used the supercomputer to simulate the situation of Moon 2 1 month from now. Do you know what I saw?"

Guang Zhen knew the question was rhetorical, so he sat quietly. Yao Yuan added, "This creature... After it covers the moon, it'll swallow it whole! Like a snake, it gobbles a planet several times bigger than itself whole and then takes time to let its internal digestion system take care of the valuable resources before disposing the rest as waste material! It doesn't drain the moon slowly but swallows it in one go!"

Guang Zhen could feel sweat pouring down his face. He tried to say something, but he was at a loss. Yao Yuan, though, was not done. "Of course, this shouldn't come as much of a surprise, since it would take millennia to slowly drain a planet dry. Its method is much more efficient. After Moon 2 is swallowed, this planet will most definitely be its next target... If that's true, we have another problem to worry about. If the creature ventures close to this planet with Moon 2 still in its body, it'll definitely lead to a cataclysmic disaster. The binary stars will clash and shatter upon impact. Then again, when the stars got close enough, the gravitational forces between the 2 stars will create a fluctuation big enough to tear the Hope asunder! We won't even live to see the planets clash.

"Hopefully, the creature has enough common sense to not attempt something suicidal. However, this doesn't mean that we're safe... Ol' Wong, this is a picture taken by Ye Mu an hour ago. Keep this to your eyes alone," Yao Yuan warned as he retrieved a picture gingerly out of his drawer and handed it to

Guang Zhen.

Guang Zhen accepted the photo and noticed instantly that the picture was taken with a high-power camera. The Barracks had similar equipment, but they weren't as powerful. This was clear because the details on this photo were much clearer than the ones taken by the Barracks. Guang Zhen could even see the several meters big pebbles clearly.

On the picture, a lively, organ-like creature was splattered onto the planet surface. Interspersed among the creature were several spheres of varying sizes. The spheres were dark brown in color and had a collagen-like shell. It was hard to tell what their uses were.

"This is the second picture taken 30 minutes ago..." Yao Yuan passed over another photo.

Guang Zhen's expression changed the moment he laid eyes on the picture. There was murderous intent in his steely gaze.

The spheres had cracked open in the second picture. Several winged, fleshy monsters had crawled out from within. In the picture, some were already in flight, while others that were obviously newly hatched monsters gathered around a gash on the planet's surface, licking some sort of green liquid that had pooled there... "This is the third picture sent over by Ye Mu several minutes before you arrived," Yao Yuan said as he passed over the last picture.

This last picture wasn't as magnified as the previous two, for the

intention was to capture the entire landmass in profile. Spread across the landmass were... millions upon millions of such egg-like spheres!

With a heavy countenance, Yao Yuan added, "I have reasons to believe that this organic spaceship is preparing for assault. I dare say these fleshy, winged creatures are their equivalent to our combat jets. In 2 to 3 days, there will be millions of these creatures. Even if the spaceship itself doesn't come close to us, do you think we can stop these creatures?"

Guang Zhen went silent for a long time before finally saying, "Then what should we do? Give this planet up?"

Yao Yuan stood up to pace the room. "No, surrender is not an option. We might not encounter a planet like this again in our lifetime... We will fight even if this might be our last stand!"

Guang Zhen lifted his head and leveled a serious glance at Yao Yuan. "But how can we fight? Ol' Yao, where there's life, there's hope. I'm more than willing to fight alongside you to my last breath, but if you are to drag the entirety of the Hope in this doomed battle... I..."

Yao Yuan matched his gaze. "I understand. When I took over the Black Star Unit, I did say that if I ever issue a death-seeking order for my own benefit, you have the right to execute me. I haven't forgotten... I should rephrase, because I believe we still have a trick up our sleeves that could lead us to victory."

"Huh? What trick? If it could guarantee this planet's safety and humanity's continuity, just say it. Even if it requires my life, I'm willing to give it." Guang Zhen straightened himself.

Yao Yuan laughed. "What use do I have for your life? I still need you alive to act as my second-in-command... In any case, it's impossible to create 'that' thing with such short notice. We don't have the technology nor the power supply to make the plan successful. Of course, with the engineer bots, we could rush to build 5 extra reactors, but without the key technology, it'll all be useless, so we have to let 'that' thing go for now.

"Our real trump card is this..."

Yao Yuan then handed Guang Zhen a faded report.

Guang Zhen flipped through it immediately. The report had nothing of note but one thing... the executive order to dismantle the crystal reactors and to preserve alien plants.

Chapter 150: Tricked!

Ying led Zhang Heng, Ren Tao, Ebon, Liu Bai, and 5 Survivors, so 10 Black Star troopers in total, to the surface in the shuttle on the 3rd day after the activation of the creator's particle. It was dusk and thus the time to take over the surveillance shift from Ye Mu's unit.

As Ye Mu was getting on the shuttle to return to the Hope, Zhang Heng ran to catch up to her. "I've spent years looking for you. Now that we finally meet, are you seriously going to ignore me?" Zhang Heng asked.

Ye Mu turned to glance at Zhang Heng. Born of an Asian-European heritage, Ye Mu had exotic and handsome features. A short scar ran in the middle of her brow, but instead of ruining her face, it lent her an air of valiance. She replied lightly, "Is there anything you need from me, Lieutenant?"

A self-conscious Zhang Heng mumbled as if to himself, "I've been meaning to thank you. If not for your help a few years ago on the meteorite base, I wouldn't be standing here today. I meant to find you to thank you personally after I woke up at the hospital..."

A faint blush rose to Ye Mu's face. She interjected, "I'm sorry, but that was so long ago that I've forgotten all about it already. Is there anything else, Lieutenant?"

Zhang Heng stared blankly at Ye Mu for an extended period of time before sighing. "No, there's nothing else. I'll get out of your

unit's way now."

Ye Mu saluted and led her team to the shuttle without a backward glance.

Zhang Heng stood watching the shuttle drift away. After some time, he heard Ebon's mocking laugh beside him. Then he felt a harsh slap on his shoulder before Ebon's baritone voice drifted down. "Actually, we knew you've been searching for her all these years, but... since Ol' Wong said she's not a good pair for you, we've been keeping it under wraps. You only have yourself to blame since you couldn't pick up the courage to ask any of us or to directly flip through the army log."

"What do you mean by not a good pair?" Zhang Heng questioned.

Ebon's tone turned serious. "She's an elite soldier of an Eastern European sect. They were trained to kill since they were young. It's a miracle that she still has traces of humanity left... Don't look so shocked. Many of us from the old Black Star Unit are just like her. With the exception of Ol' Captain and Ol' Wong, our lives are spent killing. Our brains are wired to think like a humanized weapon. And she's just the same..."

"...I heard she has a brother," Zhang Heng said to no one in particular.

"That person is technically not her brother." Unexpectedly, it was Ying who came over to explain. He added in an uncharacteristically gentle voice, "The guy is the son of her former

comrade. She fell during one of their skirmishes. The guy's mother died to save Ye Mu's life, so ever since, she has been taking care of the guy on her behalf."

"But the person is too close to her age to be her adopted son! Don't tell me... she's already in her fifties?!" Zhang Heng exclaimed.

Ying shook his head. "When she joined the Hope, she was only 21, and the guy was 17. I heard that she adopted him when he was only 8, so yes, they're more like siblings than parent and child."

"17? That means she has been his sole caretaker for... 9 years. Since she was 12? How does a 12-year-old managed to do all that..." Zhang Heng said disbelievingly. However, he looked at Ebon's and Ying's serious expressions and knew that they weren't kidding.

"That's right. She joined her sect when she was 10. No wonder she has such an imposing aura. Call it the shared intuition of the predator, but whenever she's close by, I get unconsciously alert. Many others in the military have told me the same," Ebon added.

(So she... had her first taste of killing when she was 10. I can't imagine what her life's like...) Ying addressed him. "Zhang Heng, don't take this the wrong way, but even though you're part of the Black Star unit, deep down in our hearts, we all know that you belong to a world different than ours. I would die for you, but there's just a gap that it's impossible to cross. Girls like Ning Xue and Mao Miao belong to your world; you guys share the same world vision. Know your boundaries, or else it'll be you that will end up getting hurt, understood?"

Zhang Heng balled his hands together, but he uttered no retort. Within his heart, other than the previous appreciation and curiosity about this woman by the name of Ye Mu, a new sense of empathy emerged.

Then everyone went back to work. The surveillance unit was tasked with taking pictures of Moon 2 at 30 minute intervals, while the rest was spent lying on the grass waiting for stuff to happen. So far, the diagnostic on the planet's atmosphere and virus was still progressing, so the team had to be in spacesuits because no one was allowed to have direct contact with the planet's environs for the sake of safety.

The true enemy of the day was boredom. Time was spent literally staring at clouds in the sky. Even though the spacesuits came with 1 TB storage, making it possible to upload movies or music into it, no one dared to do so for fear of Ying's wrath. When the situation required it, Ying could be more heartless than Yao Yuan, and no one dared to test the extent of his wrath.

Time whiled away until it was almost midnight and the team started to nod off. The only person fully awake was Ying. To preserve his energy, he only used his seeker's power during the photo sessions that occurred every 30 minutes. Regardless, it was impressive that Ying had managed to maintain full alertness while everyone else, including those who weren't using their powers, were already leaden with tiredness.

Zhang Heng found himself drifting into his dream when he was suddenly assaulted with a tense warning. He shot up into a seated

position so drastically that the gun that sat in his grasp flew out into the air.

"Danger! Everyone be prepared, danger incoming!" Zhang Heng yelled at the top of his lungs.

The rest of his team came to their senses immediately. No one doubted Zhang Heng's capability as the Diviner. Ying reacted the fastest; with an arch of his body, he sprung up to train his gun at the sky as he activated his power. He whispered, "Where's the danger? From the sky? Around us? Is it the mutated meat ball? Or a threat from this planet?"

Zhang Heng had paled considerably. His eyes wandered their surrounding aimlessly, adding, "Not from the sky, it's coming from around us. I've never felt so disgusted in my life. I feel like I'm being slimed all over with guts, blood, and offal. The feeling also won't recede."

With that, everyone knew what he was referring to... the meat thing on Moon 2!

Ying whipped his head upwards. The sky was empty, not even a cloud in sight. With his seeker's power, he could see the creatures still crowding the meat monster on Moon 2; they were inactive. He yelled, "Everyone return to the shuttle, but don't let your guard down. Liu Bai, I need you to take a look at Zhang Heng; he's not doing so well. Ren Tao, tell me, what do I need to do now?"

Ren Tao issued a bitter laugh. "Why does every single one of you

sound like Yao Yuan? I can't help you if we don't know anything, okay?"

Ying glared at Ren Tao and shouted, "Ebon, come with me! Ren Tao's right, we need information. Where is the source of malice, how will the enemies from Moon 2 appear? There are too many unknowns... Liu Bai, you need to bring Zhang Heng back to the Hope. Then report to Yao Yuan immediately and tell him we need back up!"

Liu Bai saluted and carried the limp Zhang Heng in his arms as they rushed towards the shuttle.

The expressions of the 5 Survivors instantly soured. The shuttle was their only way back; if there was apparent danger, why couldn't all of them just retreat? Now they were trapped.

As if reading their minds, Ren Tao warned, "Don't even dare to think of running. This hole is the only way to reach the Hope. If there is an actual alien threat, we'll have to keep this entrance safe with our lives. Don't you guys get it? If this entrance is lost, all our families and friends will die trapped in the ship!"

Simultaneously, he ran to the shuttle and yelled, "Liu Bai, tell Yao Yuan, we were tricked! The creature on Moon 2 had already sent over its underlings when the sun was still high in the sky. Their traces were covered by the planets' rotation. We forgot to account for the back of the moon that was hidden during the day."

Liu Bai didn't verbally respond, but he waved his hands to signal

that he had heard Ren Tao. 10 seconds later, the shuttle door closed and it descended down the hole.

Ebon and Ying scanned their surroundings with their weapons out. Ying had a Gaussian sniper rifle, and strapped onto his back was an electromagnetic sawblade. Ebon had a mini Gaussian rail cannon in his hands and a sawblade on his back. However, to match his size, Ebon's sawblade was so ludicrously big that it looked like a cardboard cutout.

Before the pair could begin their recon, they found themselves blanketed by shadows. Under the 2 moons' weak light, the shadows materialized into monstrous silhouettes... Their attackers had sturdy exoskeletons, scythe-like claws, and mouths that extended to 6 gaping cavities. The smaller among them was about 1 meter tall, while the bigger ones were more than 6 meters in height. There were more than a million of them, and each one occupied a different form... "As Black Stars!" Ying yelled.

"For life or for death!"

Came Ebon's lonely echo before it was drowned out by the artillery sound of his rail cannon!

Chapter 151: Unexpectedly Strong! Black Star Troopers!

The Black Star slogan hadn't really caught on with the troopers because it wasn't that impressive, and because it too steeped in the Black Star Unit's history.

After all, the slogan had been the Black Stars' for almost 50 years!

This was pretty much the Black Stars' death march slogan. When Ying wailed the slogan, it meant that he was already prepared to not return alive!

As Ebon's rail cannon went roaring away, Ying knelt down to use his angled leg as support for his rifle. Then he began to snipe the bigger monsters among the crowd... In a matter of seconds, the area was dripping with monster blood and guts.

The Gaussian rail gun was doing its work. It had a firing speed of 30,000 shots per second, and the bullets had an initial velocity that could reach up to a maximum of several thousand kilometers per second. Basically, the bullet would find itself outside of the ozone layer a second after it was fired. Its power couldn't be underestimated!

Despite the monsters' scary appearance, they were nothing compared to the raw power of the 4th revolution weaponry. Their exoskeletons might look tough, but they were anything but when faced with these reinforced weapons.

Ying's shot took down a 6-meter-tall creature, and Ebon followed it up by annihilating the smaller underlings around it. In just a blink of an eye, a sizable gang of monsters became nothing more than a heap of fleshy mess!

Only then did the Survivors and Ren Tao begin to come to. They too lifted their guns and shot at the adversaries. Without surprise, the monsters fell under the bullets like paper mache. Even Ying's team was shocked at how fragile these creatures were.

There was a chance that they would live! However, before they could relax, a visible layer of electricity appeared around the bigger monsters. The layer rendered all of their bullets useless.

"Damn, electromagnetic shield! Looks like the big creatures aren't for aggressive purposes!" Ying yelled. He turned to realize that his team had already spread out to deal with the onslaught. The creator's particle isolator in their combat suits had only a 1 meter radius. In other words, they had to get close to communicate with one another.

Shaking his head, he pulled out his sawblade and rushed headfirst towards the bigger creatures that were at the enemies' backline.

As Ying rushed forward, the framework in his combat suit sensed his motion as well as rise in adrenaline to activate a supermagnetic growth field. Originally meant to promote plant growth, this technology's actual usage was to desensitize g-force!

Yes, g-force!

When an organism achieves sudden acceleration, g-force will be formed. G-force is created due to the density difference between cellular fluids and rigid cell structure. Therefore, under extreme acceleration, the density of the cellular fluids will get so overwhelming that the body will implode from within. This is the reason why g-force can be a valid cause of death.

For mankind in the 3rd revolution, g-force was a mystery. In fact, many countries were investing into g-force technology when Earth was still around. However, the research went nowhere. There was no way to prevent the damage caused by g-force when the human body reaches the acceleration of several thousand meters per second.

That problem was solved in the 4th revolution though. The technology to manipulate the human body at a cellular level had arrived!

One such technology was the electromagnetic growth field. Electromagnetic waves could be used to get into humans' deep tissue. Other than increasing plant growth rate, the technology could be used to counter g-force during acceleration.

The technology was used to push not only the solid parts of the human body, like bones, but also the fluids forward during acceleration. The forward motion was found out to be the most effective direction to offset g-force!

This was why mankind could survive piloting the combat jet even though it could reach up to several hundred kilometers of acceleration per second!

The technology was replicated in the Black Star troopers' space armor. During particle flux acceleration, the Space Armor Prototype 1 would use its electromagnetic growth field to offset the increasing g-force. With these devices in place, the space armor could allow its wearer to reach up to 200 meters acceleration per second!

Not only that, the electromagnetic growth field has another important use. Due to the difference in the weight of the electromagnetic and gravity fields, time flows differently. This has seen real world experimentation in the twentieth century.

Like how the growth field can speed up a plant's growth, it can make a human's response rate go faster. The increase is, however, dependent on personal ability.

As a Homo Evolutis, Ying's reflexes had seen a tremendous increase under the effect of the electromagnetic growth field!

As he leaped forward, the internal AI of the space armor activated the particle flux to support Ying's running start. He found himself several hundred meters away from where he was just seconds ago, and he was still accelerating. He zipped down a straight line about 8 seconds before jumping upwards, his sawblade glinting in the moonlight.

His blood curdling, Ebon whipped his rail gun away and rushed towards Ying, brandishing his own sawblade.

The other Survivors were glued to their feet. They were firing their guns in an area around them aimlessly. During Ebon's mid-acceleration, a group of 1-meter-tall monsters leaped into the air, covering the area above Ebon's head with their writhing mass before dropping down and smothering him.

"We're totally done for! These monsters are endless, and our bullets are useless against their electromagnetic shields..."

The 5 Survivors unconsciously moved to gather around Ren Tao. In their heart, they knew that both Ying and Ebon were a lost cause, so in a desperate bid for survival, they placed their bets on the sole remaining skilled Homo Evolutis, Ren Tao.

Their close proximity caused Ren Tao to hear the person's despairing exclamation. "Move out of the way! Have you guys gone through several months or several days of training? Such shame! Those are your families down there! I'd die before I let any harm come to my sister! Get out of my way, you're blocking my blade!"

Ren Tao lifted his sawblade and tore through the monster crowd. The space armor gave him the boost he needed, so he reached Ebon's side in 7 seconds! He then unleashed a side that no one had seen before. As a Thinker, Ren Tao had spent most of his time on the battlefield strategizing, so it came as a shock for everyone when they saw their strategist tear through the mass of fleshy

monsters.

As the bodies of the monsters fell, Ren Tao's brain started calculating. With the combined power of all the Homo Evolutis and the space armors' aid, it was fully possible that they could live to see another day!

Suddenly, the ground shook. Ebon emerged from underneath the a monster mountain with his eyes blazing. Swinging his sawblade, he rampaged through the battlefield. Like a steamroller, he rammed a bloody trail through enemy ranks. An alien darted towards him, baring its claws, but he cleaved it perfectly in half.

Like the God of war, Ebon was showcasing his might on the battlefield!

In his rampage, a few aliens managed to claw at Ebon, but those barely slowed him down. Ren Tao observed that the space armor not only increased their reflexes and offset the g-force, the armor was interlaced with special alloys created by the alien plant. That gave it a shell that was indestructible by the aliens' standard!

Since this was the Black Star troopers' first actual combat, Ren Tao was pleasantly surprised at how unstoppable they were!

At that moment, an electromagnetic shielded alien was cut in half, revealing a perfectly unscathed Ying standing above its dying body.

Ren Tao's voice rang out as he riddled an alien that appeared before him with bullets... "We can win! The backup will bring about 10 skilled Homo Evolutis and 100 Survivors... With that support, we can absolutely win this!"

Chapter 152: Time for War!

Yao Yuan had been stewing in fear and anxiety for minutes before Liu Bai arrived bearing news. Other than the few Diviners onboard, whose danger senses had been singing for the past few days, the rest of the public mulled about without a concern in the world.

Only after Liu Bai clambered onto the Hope with a completely out-cold Zhang Heng on his back did Yao Yuan know that they were struck with an ambush!

"Damn! How many enemy aliens were there? Where's the rest of the unit?" Yao Yuan screamed at Liu Bai with bloodshot eyes.

Liu Bai answered calmly, "I left too early to tell how many enemies were there in total... Plus, I had to leave on my own because Zhang Heng was not looking so well."

Yao Yuan turned to Zhang Heng immediately. The boy had lost consciousness and was fidgeting all over like he was suffering from epilepsy. Yao Yuan collected himself quickly because he knew Liu Bai had made the right choice under the circumstances. Returning to the Hope allowed him to both rescue an important member of the ship and to bring back updates from the front lines... Information was everything in a situation where creator's particles had been deployed.

"Liu Bai, you're off medical duty; leave Zhang Heng to the medical unit. Help me prepare for combat."

Yao Yuan retrieved from his pocket a red communicator. A sharp siren wailed through the Hope's fifth floor when he pressed a button on it.

"The Hope is under attack! All Black Star troopers and the Hope Defense Unit, please prepare for combat! I repeat. The Hope is under attack! All Black Star troopers and the Hope Defense Unit please prepare for combat! This is not a drill, I repeat, this is not a drill!"

The announcement followed the siren. According to protocol, all military personnel had to gather at the Hope's training field to wait for orders within 5 minutes of the announcement. Whether one was resting or eating, it made no difference; an order was an order.

Yao Yuan arrived at the field in less than 5 minutes. All 140 plus Black Star Troopers were already there. This was an elite unit composed of purely Homo Evolutis. Thanks to the increase in Homo Evolutis brought upon by the second fever, Yao Yuan decided to limit the Black Star Troopers to a small yet elite unit. Everyone was armed with Gaussian rifles, electromagnetic sawblades, and Space Armor Prototype 1s. Few among them were also pilots for Space Combat Jet Prototype 003.

The Hope Defense Unit, on the other hand, had about 3,600 members. Armed with reinforced space combat suits, Gaussian rifles, and charged bayonets, this was a unit that was meant to win via overwhelming numbers. Every platoon was fitted with 1 mini Gaussian Gatling cannon, every company 2 mini Gaussian

cannons, and every battalion 2 to 3 medium Gaussian cannons. These 2 were the main military units that made up the Hope's army.

Yao Yuan wasted no time to address the gathered men and women. "Mobilize all 3 main units within the Black Star Troopers now. Use the shuttles to get aboveground and help exterminate all enemies in sight. Secure the perimeter and wait for further orders... Ol' Wong, you'll be leading the teams, go now!"

Guang Zhen saluted. "Yes, Sir!" With the rest of the Black Star Troopers, they rushed towards the shuttle hangar.

Yao Yuan then trained his attention at the remaining 3,600 soldiers. "This ship is currently under alien attack. Right above us, our dispatch unit was ambushed. They might be dead by now, so I'll skip the sentimentalities. With the Black Star Troopers forging the path for us, we're going to arrive to clean up the rest. I'll be personally leading your party for this mission!

"Combat Battalion A, Battalions 1, 2, and 3, fall out!" Yao Yuan ordered.

About 1,500 soldiers shifted into position in an orderly fashion.

Yao Yuan continued, "Your battalions will be armed with standard space combat gear. Follow closely behind the Black Star Troopers. Aid them in securing the perimeter. Go now."

"Sir, yes, Sir!" The 3 battalion commanders and 3 second lieutenants saluted in unison. Then they ran to catch up with the troopers.

"Support Battalion B, Battalion 4, 5, and 6, fall out!" Yao Yuan yelled.

Another 1,500 soldiers shifted into position. Yao Yuan added, "Your mission will be to help the troopers and combat battalion A secure the perimeter. In about 10 minutes, your battalion will arrive at the battlefield with long-ranged weapons to provide cover."

"Sir, yes, Sir!" the 3 battalion commanders replied.

Yao Yuan turned to the last 600 plus soldiers. "Scraper Battalion C, your task will start after the combat has reached its mid-point. Head out after 30 minutes and start building battlefield modifications around the temporary base. I'll allow the usage of heavy duty transport vehicles and large creator's particles isolators as well as large high-energy electromagnetic batteries."

The battalion commanders replied, "Sir, yes, Sir!"

While all of this were going on, the Guang Zhen-led troopers had already arrived at the battlefield. They were stunned by the scene that unfolded before their eyes the moment the shuttle window opened to the surface.

The field was littered with so many alien bodies that their blood had pooled into a green-colored stream. Chipped exoskeletons and meat hunks dotted the landscape. There were heaps after heaps of alien carcasses!

Ebon's almost 3 meters tall space armor stood out like a sore thumb amidst the grotesque scene. He was still crashing through the battlefield. Every enemy that stood in his path was shredded down. A gang of aliens tried stopping him by forming a flesh wall, but he rammed through it with ease like he was a human tank!

"Tank? You're underestimating the power of Space Armor Prototype 1."

The word "tank" triggered a memory in Guang Zhen's mind. He remembered arguing with Bo Li. This was during a discussion on possible vehicular addition to the Hope's military. Since the Hope no longer needed to worry about overload during warp, the Barracks could afford to consider engineering armored vehicles, like tanks.

Bo Li said, in her condescending tone, "Just in terms of technology, the space armor is more advanced than the combat jet. So why would we want a tank? A tank will be useless with the presence of the creator's particle. It will be nothing more than an empty tin can! We should focus our efforts on high-mobility, high-compatibility, high-speed, and high-defense body armor!

"Furthermore, a normal vehicle, like a tank, wouldn't showcase the power of the Homo Evolutis. Yes, a tank might be able to rival 2 enemies, but the space armor's better than that. According to its

wearer's ability, it'll be able to adapt and improve its wearer's combat capability. It is the perfect technology to showcase the value of the Homo Evolutis."

Guang Zhen was a veteran soldier, so even though he might not want to admit it, he knew the importance of the space armor. However, his mind was set in the times of World War 1, where tanks were the undisputed kings of the battlefield. After being shut down by Bo Li, he even went into a slight depression.

At that moment he finally accepted the strength of the space armor, especially when it was worn by the Homo Evolutis. Armed with so many pieces of 4th revolution technology, if pitted against a tank, Guang Zhen believed the armored Homo Evolutis could easily flip the tank over like it was made of paper.

Guang Zhen spotted a safe spot among the sea of bodies. 5 Survivors were camped around the spot, firing around them while Ying, Ebon, and Ren Tao were slashing through enemy ranks with their sawblades. Naturally, he also spotted the bigger aliens who had electromagnetic shields that protected them from bullets.

Noticing this, Guang Zhen narrowed his eyes. There was a lethal glint in them.

Guang Zhen had many differences with Yao Yuan in terms of policies. He was, by all accounts, a by-the-rules soldier. The thought that flashed through his mind then was to execute the 5 shameless Survivors where they stood.

Before he could do anything and before the shuttles could properly land, about 1,000 2-meters-tall alien creatures burst out from underneath the ground. They were different from the giant electromagnetic shielded creatures and the small alien foot soldiers because they had a 1-meter-long shafts that protruded from their chests. And they were all trained at the 2 shuttles.

Then electricity started swirling around the shafts. Numerous metallic pieces shot out of the shafts with unexpected speed, and before anyone could react, two transport shuttles blew up in mid-air...

Chapter 153: Execution!

"Gaussian weapons!"

Ying, Ebon and Ren Tao exhaled in relief when they saw the arrival of back-up. The Space Armor Prototype 1's capability was beyond their wildest expectations. It enabled them to basically lord over the battlefield.

However, it was also incredibly draining. Unlike during training or drills, they were out of breath after a mere 10 minutes on the battlefield. Another 10 minutes and they would be lying exhausted on the floor, and another 15 minutes after that, they would find themselves staring at death!

Therefore, when the backup arrived, relief swept through the 3 of them. Before they could rejoice though, 2 transport shuttles exploded before their eyes. Ying and Ebon gritted their teeth in anger while Ren Tao hung his head in despair.

These worm-like creatures managed to genetically engineer Gaussian weaponry out of their bodies? This was an impossible feat of engineering.

Then again, the giant spaceship on Moon 2 contained polymerized reactors. This was in and of itself a biological impossibility because no natural cells would be able to withstand the high heat created by the reactors... However, the reality was that the giant organism did contain reactors. Not only that, it could even dispense creator's particles! These were not organic

products!

Ren Tao despaired because their enemies not only were endless but also had access to 4th revolution technology. At the same time, the Hope's greatest fighting force, the Black Star Troopers, were wiped out with 1 shot. Under such circumstances... the only chance for survival the Hope had was to warp in spite of the gravitational influence between the binary stars and from the planet itself. Then pray that mankind would survive the warp. This was an unwinnable battle; in fact, they should consider themselves lucky if they could manage to escape.

The main objective was to defend the opening that led to the Hope. If the tunnel fell into enemy hands, the Hope would either have to warp immediately or wait for a massacre. To complete said objective, they needed the Black Star Troopers to help secure the perimeter around the tunnel so that the defense unit could set up a temporary base around the area. With the opening cleared, the Hope could lift up and warp without fear... but the Black Star Troopers were already gone.

In other words, the defense unit wouldn't be able to follow up. The only thing that awaited them should they appear would be death! After that it would be the death of humanity!

His sister, she'll die too. Like how their parents had died on that night... "No!"

Suddenly, a 3-meter-tall person walked out of the shuttle's smoldering debris. As the smoke dispersed, more silhouettes appeared behind him. Other than a little char on their space

armor, they seemed to suffer no damage. Incidentally, the armor's electromagnetic shields had saved them from the bullets. Ren Tao sighed in relief. The lack of investment into the transport shuttle, meaning it wasn't equipped with energy reactors, had saved the troopers' lives. Chain explosions were prevented.

Guang Zhen shook himself awake as he found the energy to stand up. He then ordered, "Start fighting! Spread out with 3 in a team! It's time for combat!"

However, no one outside of a 1 meter radius from Guang Zhen heard his order. Furthermore, many were still dazed from the explosion. After all, many of the troopers were new army recruits, and the new Homo Evolutis were normal civilians just months ago.

Guang Zhen saw the troopers still immobile, so he changed tack, yelling at the few people around him, "Stick close to me and follow my orders closely."

The few around him were all Survivors. They were still in a state of disorientation. It wasn't until Guang Zhen repeated himself in a roar that their months-long training kicked in. They replied, "Yes, Sir!"

Guang Zhen started running. Even though he was not a Homo Evolutis, as the leader of an elite force, his physical ability was already miles ahead of normal soldiers. The space armor improved his stride as he circled around the ruins of the 2 shuttles. He yelled at every soldier that he stumbled across to get into battle. After a loop around the shuttles, about 50 people rushed into the fray, brandishing their sawblades. Most of the brave souls were Homo

Evolutis from the first batch. The remaining troopers either stood around vacantly or they copied the previous 5 Survivors and unloaded their bullets into the ground around where they stood.

Guang Zhen's eyes simmered with lethal intent. Without hesitation, he walked to the 5 Survivors. Gripping the handle of his sawblade, he ordered, "Soldiers! Take up arms and get into the battlefield! Follow the lead of your leaders and charge!"

"..."

The 5 Survivors of course knew the Hope's acting captain. Guang Zhen was also Yao Yuan's named successor. Their faces blanched the moment they heard his orders. 2 among them even doubled over. It appeared they had vomited in their combat suit.

"But there are so many aliens..."

They said hesitantly. One of them, who looked to be the eldest, finally confessed, "There are way too many of them. It'll be a waste of time and energy even if we go in. I'm not leaving..."

Guang Zhen's temper flared. He pulled out his blade and sawed through the man's waist. There then an uncomfortable sound of metal grinding on metal. Tough as the space armor might be, it fell under the sawblade's might.

"Soldier! This is a battlefield and those are your orders! Violating them makes you a deserter and that gives me the permission to

perform your execution under military law!"

Guang Zhen wore a murderous countenance. His armor was painted crimson with the soldier's blood. The man screamed murder as blood oozed out of the gaping wound on his waist. Because his armor had been split open, his violent screams were carried by the air through the battlefield.

Those inanimate troopers turned their heads towards the source of the scream. The picture they saw couldn't even factor in their minds. Their acting captain was standing coldly over a fellow soldier who was sawed in half, his blade dripping with blood.

The 4 other Survivors were shocked and dismayed. Their protective instinct ushered them to lift up their weapons at Guang Zhen as he took deliberate steps towards them. Overwhelmed by his force, they involuntarily took steps back as Guang Zhen neared. Their fingers froze over the gun triggers.

"Pull out your sawblades and charge into combat or I'll have the 4 of you executed as deserters! Your death notice will say that you died from cowardice and shame!" Guang Zhen yelled before lifting his arm that was not holding his sawblade upwards. The soldiers that had been following him snapped into attention and trained their guns at the 4 Survivors.

There was a veteran soldier among them that wailed, "Think about what you're doing! Drop your weapons! Do you really want to desert? Drop your weapons!"

The 4 Survivors were startled by the veteran soldier and dropped their rifles instantly. "Major, we're not deserters, we'll obey your orders!" a Survivor said hurriedly. He then lifted his sawblade and ran into combat.

The other 3 followed.

Guang Zhen whipped his head around and his eyes were as cold as a grave. The Survivors who had been following him felt a chill instantly. They too rushed into battle, led by the veteran soldier.

The other troopers who had gathered around the shuttle ruins were also shocked into action. A dark green group cut through the mass of aliens like an arrow slicing through air. Their numbers were small, but their opponents presented 0 resistance.

Guang Zhen sighed heavily. His little run around the battlefield was costing him his life. He wondered how others could manage to wear the space armor for so long. Suddenly, a trooper materialized near him. Guang Zhen yelled instinctually, "Charge, soldier!"

"Alright, I hear ya. Don't need to yell."

The person was Ren Tao. He dragged his tired body to Guang Zhen's side. "Such vigor. No wonder Yao Yuan picked you as his successor... Don't worry, we have this battle in the bag. You just got here, so you haven't understood the full extent of the Black Star Troopers' power. Now that everyone's here, this first battle...

"Is ours."

Chapter 154: Base and the Anima

Yao Yuan followed the Hope Defense Unit to the battlefield. When they reached aboveground, the Black Star Troopers had already removed more than 100,000 aliens and had cleared a 10 by 10 kilometers ground. This prevented their transport shuttles from being shot down by the aliens. However, when Yao Yuan saw the ruins of the previous 2 shuttles smoldering, he crash-landed the shuttles and immediately ordered everyone out.

Yao Yuan wore a red space armor, so he stood out quite fairly. It didn't take too long for Guang Zhen and Ren Tao to spot and reach him. He caught up with them mid-way and asked, "Give me a field report! Any deaths?"

Guang Zhen saluted, "So far... only 1 death, he died... in combat. The rest is still unknown because they're still in combat."

"Isn't that a given? How else is the soldier going to die, tripped and fell to his death? Ren Tao, you've been here the longest, so give me an update. Also, explain what you do meant when you told Liu Bai that we've been tricked." Yao Yuan coughed.

Ren Tao smiled ruefully. "Well, we're holding up surprisingly well. The Black Star Troopers are unexpectedly strong, so I believe we aren't in any danger at the moment. The actual number of fatalities that I predict will not be more than 10. However... I suggest you immediately send someone back to the Hope to ask Saburo, the Japanese doctor, to speed up his progress of producing a vaccine, or else there will be more people that die from sickness than in combat..."

"About the fact that we were tricked, do you believe these aliens appeared suddenly? That's impossible. I guarantee they snuck over and hid themselves on the other side of this planet during the day. Since the sun is blinding on this side during this day, that coupled with the creator's particle, it's a perfect ambush plan."

Yao Yuan frowned and looked about. "How about their numbers? Hmm... Never mind, I can see for myself how seriously we've been ambushed..."

Yao Yuan whirled around and shouted, "Battalions 1, 2, and 3 gather within the shuttle's isolator range!"

The soldiers instantly separated into their assigned battalions and crowded orderly around the shuttle.

Yao Yuan turned to Guang Zhen. "Ol' Wong, you're good at commanding, so I need you to stay behind and be the commander. Ren Tao will also stay as your strategist. In 10 minutes, Support Battalion B will arrive, and Scrapper Battalion C will arrive 20 minutes after that. I'll leave the men and women in your capable hands." Yao Yuan saluted before leaving to join the skirmishes.

Guang Zhen led Ren Tao to the front of the battalions. He hollered, "Battalion commanders and second-lieutenants, please fall out!"

The commanders and second-lieutenants of the 3 battalions immediately showed themselves. Guang Zhen ordered, "With the

shuttle as the center, spread out to secure a perimeter. Start setting up a base. Each battalion will be responsible for a 120 angle perimeter. Support the Black Star Troopers with long-ranged weapon if necessary, and kill any non-human threats that approach the perimeter!"

The commanders and second-lieutenants saluted. "Yes, Sir!" Under the guidance of their leaders, the battalions started to mobilize. A circular perimeter was formed and the sound of gunshots rang throughout the battlefield.

Guang Zhen sighed. "Do you know, Ren Tao? Military discipline is very much related to crowd psychology. If isolated, each and every one of the soldiers are brilliant in their own right, but when pulled into a crowd, they will often be dragged into doing stupid things. If one starts going off the rails, many will blindly follow. You've seen for yourself how much damage the 5 Survivors caused."

Ren Tao waved his hand. "The Black Star Troopers have an inherent problem. I'm sure Yao Yuan has noticed that."

Guang Zhen shook his head resignedly. "Homo Evolutis... they're not trained soldier and yet they aren't civilians. Ren Tao, you yourself are a Homo Evolutis; haven't you noticed this problem? Hopefully Yao Yuan will be able to come up with a solution soon. If not, things might not end so easily next time. Don't be so surprised; I know him better than you do. If the situation requires it, he will not hesitate to revamp the troopers. And trust me, the death count won't be in the single digits then."

Ren Tao opened his mouth but caught himself. He knew that this was not his place to comment. Therefore, he switched the topic. "By the way, your work isn't finished, is it? Don't you still need to send someone to hurry Saburo?"

Guang Zhen quickly waved a few soldiers over and sent them to the task.

Like a surging flame, Yao Yuan burned through the battlefield in his red armor.

Yao Yuan had many reservations about this gaudy suit, but the designer, Bo Li, shut him down. "You have to prepare for situations where creator's particle has been activated. Under those situations, you need something obvious to signify your presence since you're the commander. Red is the perfect color; they'll be able to spot you from miles away."

Regardless, the body armor was specially made for Yao Yuan the all-rounder, so its functionality was even better than Space Armor Prototype 1.

Its reinforced shell could withstand for about 3 seconds even when cut with the sawblade, and gaussian bullets would be blocked by an internal electromagnetic shield generator.

The armor was fitted with 3 high-power batteries and not the 2 that were given to the normal armors. This was to support the special armor's capability for greater speed. When Yao Yuan's all-rounder power was fully activated, the armor could help him

increase his speed to about 500 meters per second!

In other words, his body would become as fast as a fired bullet!

Its power was showcased perfectly in that battle. Like a cannon, Yao Yuan stormed through the alien horde, mincing every enemy that stood in his warpath.

Witnessing this, Yao Yuan relaxed slightly. He finally understood what Ren Tao meant when he said that victory was already in the bag.

Space Armor Prototype 1 coupled with the Homo Evolutis was truly a force to behold. The two supported each other in growth, making the Black Star Troopers a force to be reckoned with!

If one was to tabulate combat capability, unarmed civilians would have power of 10, unarmed Homo Evolutis power of 20, civilians with guns would have power of 100, and Homo Evolutis with guns would have power of 500. In other words, the better the weapons he was paired with, the greater the Homo Evolutis' combat capability.

When a civilian was paired with Space Armor Prototype 1 and the sawblade, their power would be 1,000. However, when Homo Evolutis was paired with similar equipment, their power could reach up to 50,000. The difference was so big that you would think they are different species altogether... Wait, different species?

Yao Yuan slowed in his onslaught and observed the situation around him. He himself only just found out how strong the space armor was, so how is it possible for the new Homo Evolutis to be so brave and willing to launch themselves into the midst of combat without prior knowledge about the strength of the combat suit?

(Ol' Wong... No wonder he hesitated before mentioning that one person died "in combat.") The thought flashed across his mind. However, he realized that the troopers were starting to come into their own. There was no shred of fear in their demeanor as they mowed down their enemies. In fact, there was even a sense of bloodlust surging through the troopers after they realized that the enemies weren't as scary as they thought but were actually as fragile as paper.

However... Many started to tire, especially Ying and Ebon, who had been there since the beginning. Their steps had gotten sluggish and their faces were suffused with a faint blush.

"Ying! Ebon! Retreat to the shuttle! This is an order!"

A voice spoke in their ears. The startled pair looked around them to search for the source, then they saw a red shadow skipping around a 6-meter-tall alien. The alien then broke into pieces. The shadow materialized into Yao Yuan, who looked straight at them.

"I'm communicating with you through my Anima power. Retreat to the shuttle! Don't make me repeat myself!"

Ying and Ebon stopped short in their tracks and stepped towards

the shuttle. Yao Yuan's voice then sounded in every trooper's ears.

"This is Yao Yuan! Take down the giant alien that's creating the electromagnetic shield!"

Chapter 155: End of Combat

One thing of note was that when Yao Yuan first created the Homo Evolutis Faction, there were rumors circulating around the Hope that its purpose was to capture Homo Evolutis as test subjects. There was a brief period of unease on the Hope. Nevertheless, the faction had come up with multiple interesting results in the past few years.

One of the faction's aims was to analyze each Homo Evolutis' specialty, usage, effect, and future importance.

Among the Homo Evolutis, the Perceptors, Seekers, and Thinkers were the easiest to analyze. According to the CAT scans, when these 3 types of Homo Evolutis activated their powers, their brain would go into overdrive, working 10 times faster than normal human beings. Of course, this was supposed to be fatal. They should have died from lack of nutrition or extreme body heat.

That was prevented by changes that were found in these 3 Homo Evolutis' genome chart. It turned out that strands of DNA that were thought to be useless coded a special protein when their power was activated. This protein helped to lower the strain felt during power activation. Of course, there's a limit to the capacity of the protein since people could still die from overexertion.

Simultaneously, the faction had found out the best method and time to train these 3 powers... Next would be the Whisperers, Animas and Diviners. The Whisperers were the backbone of the Academy. The Animas relied on something called the soul web. The concept of soul itself wasn't even scientific to begin with, so it

was hard to analyze this particular power.

The Diviners had seen the most analytic progress among the 3 because at least they knew it had something to do with a sixth sense. However, because it was also something that had plenty to do with pseudoscience, it was hard to construct a scientific analysis around it.

The most unique and most difficult to understand Homo Evolutis were the All-Rounders and the Deceivers. The All-Rounders had access to all the superhuman powers except the Deceivers', and speaking of the Deceivers, the only Deceiver on the Hope was still in a vegetative state, so almost no progress had been made on these 2 types of Homo Evolutis.

All of these analyses fulfilled one important purpose: to distill and replicate the Homo Evolutis strands in normal humans using chemicals, and that was to be the Homo Evolutis Faction's next big thing... Human Modification Project!

If used in combat setting, the Animas and All-Rounders were determined to be the most precious.

Due to the presence of creator's particles, communication had become incredibly close quarters, while the battlefield had only gotten bigger. In such situation, the Anima's power was pretty much a cheat. The fact that you could have access to information while your enemy couldn't was a big deal in deciding the sway of the battle.

Therefore, after the 4th revolution, the Anima became a tactical importance, and the All-rounder, who also had access to the Anima's power, only became that much more important!

For example, with the arrival of Yao Yuan, the whole battlefield had a seismic change.

First, the military morale was instantly raised. While the soldiers feared Guang Zhen, they respected Yao Yuan.

Because Yao Yuan had performed his Anima power during military drills, no one was shocked to find his voice in their heads. In fact, they felt comforted. They quickly fell into position. With their Homo Evolutis leaders spearheading the charge, every team of 9 followed through with Yao Yuan's orders.

Before long, the electromagnetic shield aliens were annihilated. In the next moment, the medium-sized Gaussian rail cannon started firing. Without the shields, the layer of alien foot soldiers was punctured. Yao Yuan knew the wind of the battle was shifting.

Even though the aliens still piled high like mountains, with each skirmish, Yao Yuan could see the enemy lines retreating.

"Stop charging! All Black Star Troopers, stop charging and hunker down for defense!" Yao Yuan ordered with his Anima power. He noted the time that was shown within his space armor. It had been almost 10 minutes since he reached the battlefield. In other words, Support Battalion B was arriving.

Battalion B was actually the Hope's artillery and missile men. Unlike Battalion A, their strength was not in close-quarter combat or clearing perimeter but in large-scale long-distance assaults. For example, their Gaussian cannons were so powerful that it could shred through electromagnetic shields as long as the shield wasn't generated by a battery as powerful as the Hope's.

After Yao Yuan's order to stop charging, about 10 seconds later, the enemy too stopped rushing into combat. They started retreating. However, Yao Yuan realized that they were retreating with their fallen comrades in tow. As the mountains of aliens were cleared away, other than pools of green goop and broken flesh pieces, there were almost zero intact alien carcasses.

Yao Yuan stood at the front of the troopers with his seeker power open. Then he whipped his head around. In the middle of the temporary base, a few more shuttles were arriving. Without hesitation, he submerged in a world of silence.

The material world slowly fell away, leaving behind an expanding emptiness. Gradually, he could feel his own presence. It was a fireball as radiant and warm as a small sun. After some time, other orbs of fire of varying sizes appeared around him.

(Yes, that's Ren Tao, Ying, and Ebon...) The emptiness around him gave an impression that time had slowed down, but in reality barely a second had passed. Thanks to his training, he entered communication with Ren Tao, Ying, and Ebon almost instantly.

"Ren Tao, Ying, Ebon, this is Yao Yuan. Order Battalion B to initiate a blanket fire. I want those disgusting aliens to be out of

our sight!"

The trio jostled awake. It was Ebon who shouted, "Captain's order: issue a blanket fire on the mass of aliens!"

The other 2 chimed in agreement. They were within the range of the shuttle isolator, so Battalion B mobilized after receiving the order. A turret base to support the Gaussian weaponry was erected. Small and medium sized Gaussian cannons, Gatling cannons, Gaussian shrapnel cannon, and other long-ranged siege weapons were added and charged.

"Small Gaussian cannon artillery unit, unit 1, 2... and 9 preparation complete! Reporting for duty!"

The artillery unit leaders reported to the battalion leader through a communicator. Soon after, the commander also received similar report from 4 other medium Gaussian cannon artillery units and 3 Gaussian shrapnel cannon artillery units.

"Fire!"

The ground shook unceasingly. The bombs flew past so fast that the naked eye couldn't capture their trails. Their targets were 3 spots of level fields about several tens of thousands meters away from the base. Each bomb fell like an asteroid hitting the planet. Even though the bomb shells were small and compact, the moment they hit the ground, several hundred meters of ground was leveled in a halo of dust. Even the shielded creatures weren't safe from destruction... Furthermore, this wasn't a single bomb drop, it was

a carpet bombing. The terrain seemed to change before the troopers' eyes... The bombing lasted for almost 20 minutes. A small troop took a shuttle to survey the area from the sky and they found 0 enemies alive.

The first battle between mankind and the fleshy aliens had reached an end, but everyone on the battlefield knew... this was only the beginning!

Chapter 156: The Birth

"...So far, we've lost 2 transport shuttles and 3 Black Star Troopers. 12 troopers had to be quarantined because their armors were punctured and they exhibited allergy symptoms after being exposed to the planet's air. This ends the battle report."

Yao Yuan handed the command over to Guang Zhen in the middle of combat. He had him set up a temporary base around the opening that led to the Hope. The base, a product of the 4th revolution, was fully-automated and electromagnetically shielded. Now, even if they were swamped with a sea of aliens, there was nothing to worry about as long as the base's energy and ammo didn't run out.

Yao Yuan led the Black Star Troopers to the Hope. The troopers had truly shone in this battle, so much so that Yao Yuan himself was pleasantly surprised by the troopers' capability. They had gone beyond their intended use of being an elite force. Yao Yuan found new understanding and respect for the Homo Evolutis.

The objective of the day was to find ways to save the 12 infected troopers whose bodies were covered with red spots. The other Black Star Troopers were given a well-deserved rest because Yao Yuan knew that this was going to be a drawn out battle... There was 1 trooper though that didn't have the luxury of rest, and that person was unsurprisingly Yao Yuan himself. He dragged his tired body to the war room to have a meeting with war experts and scientists. A combat video was played on the screen, and after it finished, he walked to the podium and said,

"First, it's obvious that the aliens have the advantage in numbers. If we had stumbled across them when we were still in our 3rd revolution, we would be indubitably swamped... Thankfully, the power of the Black Star Troopers was greater than most of us expected. With designs from Professor Bo Li, the combination of Homo Evolutis and Space Armor Prototype 1 has proved to be undefeatable.

"However!"

Yao Yuan pointed at the still image behind him. "There are so many aliens, but we only have 140 Black Star Troopers in total... Now after 3 deaths and 12 infections, we're left with 129 troopers! These 129 troopers aren't made of steel; they too will get exhausted, especially after a long battle!

"So what do we do next? I've ordered for a temporary base to be built aboveground, but that is merely to stall the enemies. The alien spaceship is still a threat! You all have seen what is happening to Moon 2; do you hope the same will happen to this planet?!"

Yao Yuan stopped to take a look at his watch. "8 hours from now I'll send 6 Homo Evolutis in the Space Combat Jet Prototype 003 to survey this whole planet from the skies. Simultaneously, I want an answer by then on whether the previously discussed proposal on the alien planet is usable!"

The room shuffled into motion. After some time, Ivan pressed the button to speak. "Captain, I reject the plant proposal! First, we still have no idea what species this alien on Moon 2 is. Is it an

organic spaceship, and if that's the case, is an intelligent life form guiding it from within? Maybe, this is all a misunderstanding because they've not seen a mechanically advanced civilization before. We might lose a valuable ally if we launch an attack too rashly. Furthermore, the alien spaceship might be more advanced than the plant for the plant to be of any use..."

Yao Yuan interrupted Ivan. "Professor Ivan, with all due respect, I fear you've missed out on 2 important points. No matter whether this thing is an organic spaceship or an intelligent life form, the moment we were ambushed, this became a war! 3 of our men were killed, do you understand?! Don't reject for the sake of rejecting; a government that is all talk but no action will not survive!

"Since this is a war, communication will only happen when one of us has the other under control! Humanity depends on the last tens of thousands of us surviving. What kind of precedent will we set if we are to surrender and run now? How is the public going to feel protected when its military won't pick up arms to protect its own people? Do you think humanity can survive with such a mentality?"

Yao Yuan paused to let his argument sink in. "Secondly, I'm more familiar with the habits of the alien plant than you are, Professor Ivan. First, they are harmless to human contact but will consume any other substance to create sand! We've seen this in action ourselves through the many experiments conducted by the Academy, haven't we?

Of course, there is a possibility that the plant won't harm the alien because it is an intelligent and sentient life form unlike the

rats, rabbits, pigs, goats, and cows that we've tested the plant on... This is why we have these!"

Yao Yuan turned to the operator and nodded his head. Then a 3D image appeared in the middle of the room.

The image showed about 10 squirming, injured alien creatures. They showcased incredible vitality because despite their bleeding wounds, they bounced again and again against the electromagnetic cage, sometimes even venting their aggression on each other.

"We've managed to capture these creatures using the power of the Diviner among the heaps of broken guts and sinews. I'll hand them over to the Academy, but please be very careful because they are extremely dangerous! To be safe, I'll assign a trooper to guard over a creature. They'll be around whenever you conduct the experiment."

Yao Yuan continued, "There are another 16 hours to the next war room meeting. The troopers will spend the next 8 hours resting and will gather here after the other 8 hours to listen to the result of the Academy's experiments. Hopefully, we can come to a conclusion by then..."

"Dismissed."

Chou Yue set the ceramic bowl she had in her hands down carefully. The bowl contained a meal of porridge seasoned with century egg and meat floss. Beside the bowl of piping hot porridge was a plate of kimchi and a salted egg.

Chou Yue sat looking not at the scrumptious meal but the clock that hung before it. It had been almost 8 hours since he had slumped into the room... so he should be awake soon.

Before long, Ren Tao ambled out of his bedroom, rubbing his eyes. Taking in Chou Yue, that sat on the sofa, and the meal assembled before her, he smiled. "Hey, it's my favorite breakfast. What's the occasion?"

Chou Yue pouted, "I feel like eating light lately. Why, do you object? Don't worry, it has nothing to do with you!"

Ren Tao smiled understandingly in return and moved to the bathroom to brush his teeth. He then sat down opposite Chou Yue to eat.

Chou Yue's mouth curved involuntarily upwards as she watched him wolf down her cooking, but she quickly caught herself. She asked casually, "How fierce is the combat above?"

Ren Tao answered, "It's nothing serious. We're on the defense at the moment, so everything's just routine... a group of men shooting their loads."

Chou Yue scoffed. "Could have told me that without giving me the mental image... Truthfully, the combat's not going well, is it? I've been receiving danger warnings and a suffocating sense of malice with my power even though we're several thousand meters underground... Right, when I was out buying ingredients, I saw

Zhang Heng. He was leaving the hospital to head towards the Captain's residence."

"Oh, he's awake?" Ren Tao was startled. He mumbled something to himself before smiling at Chou Yue. "Don't worry, the combat above is really not that serious... Plus, I'll be protecting you."

"Yes, I believe you will..."

At Yao Yuan's place, Zhang Heng was shell-shocked to see Ji Jie saunter out of Yao Yuan's bedroom. The girl was in her pajamas, yawning as she strode across the living room towards the bathroom. Maybe she was still fuzzy from sleep, because she didn't appear to notice Zhang Heng standing there, staring gob-smacked at her.

"...Impressive," Zhang Heng whispered under his breath, but it was still loud enough for Yao Yuan to hear him.

"Get your head out of the gutter. She was too traumatized by the disgusting aliens that she had trouble sleeping. She's still a young girl and is living alone, so when she came to me, I lent her one of my rooms..."

Yao Yuan explained nonchalantly before turning serious to ask, "So, the monster's malice... comes from its unfettered desire to consume us humans, our technology, and the Homo Evolutis?"

Zhang Heng replied, "That's right. When I was up there, I felt

swallowed by that desire before fainting. And in my dream, I saw how the monster was born...

It was truly a nightmare..."

Chapter 157: Evolution

"First there was a vast emptiness, not unlike the space currently around the Hope.

"Within this emptiness, there was a glob of writhing mass of meat. It was unexpectedly huge. Based on my speculation, it was as big as several Earths combined. Furthermore, it was emanating rays of eerie light...

"As the rays shot at the folds of flesh, the meat started decaying and breaking. Bones and sinews started falling apart from the mass of meat. Yes, I felt that it was dying, dying from old age...

"But the process took a long time, taking perhaps several millennia to complete. Using curvature navigation to travel through space on its last legs of life, it stumbled upon a life-supporting planet. It disintegrated just before entering the planet. The excess muscles and weight were abandoned into space while the glob at its disgusting center shot into the planet.

"The growth process that followed was equally long. After another several millennia, a native civilization appeared on this planet. It was an aquatic civilization. With technological advancement came an issue that similarly had troubled us: natural pollution. However, since they survived by ways of water, the effect of the pollution was viscerally felt. Therefore, when they reached the end of their 3rd revolution, their scientific focus was on technology that could reduce pollution. Then...

"When they reached 4th revolution, they had to focus on space travelling technology because the pollution had become too serious for them to undo. When their first spaceship traveled beyond their planet's orbit... they found a neutron star surging towards their planet."

Yao Yuan stood up in shock. "Wait, a neutron star? You sure? Why was this civilization attacked by a neutron star too? Could it be that it was similarly targeted like Earth?"

Zhang Heng shook his head listlessly. "Who knows? The dream I had described things that happened millennia ago... Plus, I can't really explain anything because it was all in a dream. Anyway, let me continue. The civilization too was hamstrung by the sudden appearance of the neutron star. Finally, as a last resort, the civilization pooled together to build a large spaceship with their early 4th revolution technology. However, around that time... the glob that hid itself in the planet's core hatched. Its product was a clot of bacteria, festering like an ugly wound.

"In its weak, initial stage, it could only survive by absorbing the buried plant and animal bodies around it. However, with each absorption, parts of dead bodies' DNA were translated into the bacteria's genetic coding. Gradually, the bulk of the bacteria grew.

"Finally, it grew to such a size that it couldn't hide from the planet's native civilization anymore. After running out of ideas, the civilization decided to use an H-bomb to blow the bacteria mass up in one go...

"However, things didn't go as planned. The alien had already

released parts of itself into the water source. The bacterial pieces seeped through the ground into the surface water source... Since the natives were aquatic organisms, they were easy pickings for the alien bacteria. They were slowly digested and consumed by the bacteria. From that, the mass of muscle essentially absorbed their technology. It learned how to fire bullets from within its body, how to create electromagnetic shields, and even how to build polymerized reactors. Like many of our myths, the sea granted it an unlimited force of life. It started to reproduce itself in the sea into the monsters we saw aboveground...

"Several years after that, the mass of meat fully digested the planet and left its star system. It started trawling the cosmos for more life-supporting planets to consume. This process repeats ad nauseam until finally it finds itself in this star system."

Zhang Heng leaned back in his chair to take a breath. Ji Jie, who had sat down beside Yao Yuan while Zhang Heng was talking, joined Yao Yuan in his musings.

"Let me confirm. When the meat alien was born, it didn't know any science, right? And the creatures that it produces are coded with the DNA it previously consumed?" Yao Yuan asked.

Zhang Heng nodded. "You're correct. Initially, the meat alien was a blank paper. The more organisms it consumes, the more varied the creatures it can produce. Similarly, the more civilizations it consumes, the greater its technology becomes."

Yao Yuan frowned. "But this is weird. Based on what you said, the alien's mother, before it perished, had to be a level 3

civilization because it could conduct curvature navigation. So how come this meat alien doesn't have access to those technologies?"

Zhang Heng responded, "Because the mother had gone down the wrong evolution path!"

"Wrong evolution path?" Yao Yuan and Ji Jie asked in unison.

"Yes!"

Zhang Heng explained, "The impression I got from the mother is that this species has a limited lifespan. Therefore, to increase its livelihood, it has to keep on consuming to become stronger and more technologically advanced to stave off death and decay. This is because the consumed civilization will help it improve to a level where its lifespan can be indefinitely increased. However, it is not always that the civilization it consumes will align with that purpose. For example, the mother might be incredibly strong in plant evolution, but that technology has nothing to do with animal cellular resuscitation and revival..."

"To borrow an online game analogy, the mother had made the mistake of leveling the wrong skill tree. Unlike in the games though, reality doesn't allow a reset. Therefore, to prevent its offspring from inheriting its mistakes, the offspring had to start anew. There are different colonies of this species flying through space, and only the strongest among them will survive to reach eternity."

An exasperated Yao Yuan shook his head. He added, "Alright,

let's sum up all we have said so far. First, this meat alien depends on consumption of DNA to produce a monster army to protect its main body, is that right?"

"Yes," Zhang Heng confirmed.

"Secondly, it also relies on this consumption to increase its technological level. For example, the reactors we saw came from the aquatic civilization. Is that true?" Yao Yuan continued.

"There is somewhat of a difference. This meat alien has a central consciousness that allows it to combine the technology it has absorbed and the monsters that it can produce. In my dream, I saw cannon monsters, bomber monsters, explosive monsters, Gaussian rifle monsters, and the like..."

Yao Yuan nodded. "This means the more varied the DNA and the greater the civilizations it absorbs, the more diverse the types of monster it can create... Also, its current technological level is at the early 4th revolution, right? Could that improve if we leave it on its own?"

"The ability to conflate DNA and technology aside, this alien doesn't have a creative mind. All of its technological increases came from the consumption of other civilizations. Currently, it is definitely in its early 4th revolution, so technology-wise we have the upper hand," Zhang Heng replied.

"Is that so...?" Yao Yuan asked suddenly, "Then does it have any weaknesses? Is that revealed in your dream?"

"Sadly, no." Zhang Heng paused before adding, "It doesn't appear to fear anything, not a new virus, bacteria, plants, or animals. This is because it can consume the organism to restructure its own genes. It might be harmed initially, but that contact will allow it to create antibodies out of the consumed DNA. It can consume and absorb everything and anything..."

Upon hearing that, Yao Yuan had a flashback to the monsters' retreat and their deliberate deed of retrieving the monster carcasses... Since the monsters had a central consciousness, this meant that the main body had an intended purpose for the carcasses. Could it be that the bodies could be used to create stronger monsters?

Yao Yuan had a sneaking feeling that he had forgotten something important... Suddenly, his communicator rang. He was startled but picked it up quickly, saying, "This is Yao Yuan. What's wrong?"

"...Captain, could you please come to the biology lab..."

"The monster cells have consumed the alien plants to evolve into an abnormal individual cell!"

Chapter 158: Supercell

The update from the bio lab was devastating.

The Barracks had provided many war plans to deal with the alien on Moon 2. The 3 most feasible were: one, to build a giant H-bomb. The Barracks intended to utilize 1/3 of the planet's water as hydrogen raw material and heavy water to build a giant H-bomb. An H-bomb that size should be able to blow up Moon 2 with the alien still attached to it.

However, the plan had multiple difficulties. First was to draw such an amount of water there had to be constructions of several enormous buildings, like nuclear fission plants and fission energy generators. The buildings themselves also had to be manned by trained personnel. The entire process would take about 10 years.

Moon 2 would be drained way before that, so the first plan was a fail.

The second plan was to create 'that' thing. This thing was the ultimate weapon of the 4th revolution, a weapon of mass destruction that was on a different scale compared to the 3rd revolution H-bombs. The thing was called the Genesis, an electromagnetically based tactical weapon!

Using the core 4th revolution technology, electromagnetism was employed to create micro heatwaves. The heatwaves were then amplified through reflective mirrors. Through the energy of a large polymerized reactor, the heat waves could be multiplied to

form a heat ray that was more than several thousand meters wide. This was the ultimate weapon from mankind's 4th revolution, an energy weapon that had heavy inspiration from 5th revolution technology!

Its power, if properly sustained, could evaporate a planet the size of Earth's moon in one shot!

This was the Genesis, a weapon suitable for space war!

Nevertheless, this weapon was a creation from the peak of the 4th revolution. Even the junkyard alien was still researching it when they were wiped out. Many inroads had been made by the Academy, especially with Bo Li's help, ever since mankind inherited the technology!

However, according to overall analysis and prediction, this weapon would not see the light of day in the next 10 years. The Genesis required more than the construction of a few gargantuan buildings, it required special materials, a great store of radioactive ores, and other key resources.

Even though plan 2 could handily destroy the alien, due to time and technological constraints, the plan had to be abandoned.

The third plan was to drop the alien plant on Moon 2.

The alien plant was a gathering organism engineered by a highly advanced race that mankind first stumbled across on Planet

Sahara.

It was called a gathering organism because it would digest everything except human flesh to form metal deposits and energy crystals within its body.

If it was dropped onto Moon 2, within the near future, Moon 2 would become a desert planet... that was the trump card that Yao Yuan kept all his hopes on. He believed it would be the plant that consumed the alien and not the other way around. However, the phone call he received had completely shattered his hope.

Yao Yuan, with Zhang Heng and Ji Jie in tow, arrived at the bio lab almost instantly. Standing outside the lab was a group of tired-looking scientists. Among them was Ivan.

"Professor Ivan, skip the formalities. Let's see this mutated cell," Yao Yuan said as he came forth to shake Ivan's hand.

An agitated Ivan replied, "Of course, Captain. Please follow me."

Ivan led everyone to the deepest corner of the bio lab. Within a quarantined room, 10 petri dishes sat under 10 microscopes. One of them was bubbling as if it was boiling.

"Captain, as per your orders, we've done some dissections on the alien monsters. Then we added some alien plant cells to conduct the consumption experiment..." Ivan explained while pointing at the petri dishes.

"Initially, all of the monster cells were consumed by the alien plant. It didn't stop because the alien monster cell was sentient. This is very different from us because the plant wouldn't even consume dead human cells. Everything was going along just fine until..."

Ivan referred to the bubbling dish. "When the experiment came to the 26th dish, the monster cells within it had mutated. It too was consumed like every other cell, but it didn't die within that process. On the contrary, it started devouring the alien plant. Half an hour later, the monster cells split into a mutated cell that contained the plant's genes. It has a combination of both the plant and the monster's properties.

"It can consume everything! Water, microbes, bacteria, and... metallic substances!"

Yao Yuan held onto the table for support. He asked hurriedly, "In other words, the alien cell has inherited the plant's features?"

Ivan replied firmly, "I believe so, but Captain, this is not even the thing that instilled us with so much fear..."

"There's more?" Yao Yuan asked incredulously. This was in his mind, the worst result, the third plan was also denied. Could there really be something worse?

"Sadly, yes... Captain, you better see it for yourself. I too am stumped by this development," Ivan said while wiping the sweat

off his forehead. He waved for a few of his assistants to get to work.

The microscope above the bubbling dish started moving and soon, a magnified picture of its cellular situation appeared on the monitor. Several light green color cells were presented on screen. Some were stationary, while others were devouring these stationary cells.

Yao Yuan turned towards Ivan with a raised eyebrow. "What are they doing? Why is it attacking itself?"

Ivan laughed bitterly and told the assistant, "Decrease the magnification until you can see the whole picture."

As the magnification decreased, Yao Yuan's facial expression turned from confusion to downbeat then to terror. The mobile cells were attacking the homogenous cells to obtain materials to... create cellular-sized instruments!

Yao Yuan finally realized what he was witnessing. After obtaining the necessary materials from the other cells' decomposition, the living cells created rudimentary utensils. The utensils' usage was an unknown, but they were definitely metallic because they had that metallic glint.

"What... what's this?!" a shocked Yao Yuan asked.

"Looks like they're creating an electrical circuit."

A girl's voice explained calmly.

Yao Yuan turned to see Bo Li giving a deliberate once-over at Ji Jie before adding, "Professor Ivan called me over to give a professional opinion on these metallic substances. And based on the structure, it looks like they're building an electrical circuit."

Yao Yuan said hurriedly, "Bo Li, it's good that you're here. Tell me, what is this thing's purpose?"

Bo Li's eyes floated once more to land on Ji Jie. She then explained, "I've been here for a long time, you were too occupied to notice me... It's obvious that this is a type of nano-technology. By the way, do you know how big these new cells are?"

"How big?" Yao Yuan echoed.

"About 10 nanometers. These new cells are modeled after the plant cells, so they are smaller than usual cells. Therefore, the things they're creating are typical nano-machinery..." Bo Li pointed out as she looked at the screen.

Yao Yuan started to accept the reality before him. Even though he found it unbelievable that a cell could create machinery, the cosmos was home to many mysteries.

After a long while, he questioned, "But why are these cells creating machinery? Do they have a brain?"

Ivan shook his head. "The cells are extremely basic; they don't have something as complex as a brain. This is also where we're stumped. What is urging these cells to create such complicated and delicate machinery?"

The room was silent. Yao Yuan suddenly asked, "Then can someone tell me what the use for this machinery is?"

"Communication."

Bo Li answered. "It's for communication. Our radar detected a weak signal source emanating from the petri dish. It looks like they're trying to transmit a signal."

"Signal transmission? Why are they doing that?" Zhang Heng, unable to contain his curiosity, finally asked.

Yao Yuan's expression dropped. His Thinker power told him the answer to Zhang Heng's question. "They're telling the main body on Moon 2 to quickly attack because we have something that could greatly improve its evolution...

...the alien plants!"

Chapter 159: The Arrival

"Don't worry. With the creator's particle in place, it's impossible for these signals to get through."

On the way to the war room, Zhang Heng told Yao Yuan. But Yao Yuan retorted with an argument that made his body go cold.

"About that, I've been thinking. The creator's particle has its limitation too.

"First of all, even though the creator's particle is said to be able to block all electrical signals, and it has indeed proven to do so by all our experiments, Zhang Heng, it couldn't block one particular kind of signal."

Zhang Heng lurched in his step as he asked, "And what is that?"

"Electrical signals that come from the human body, like brain waves!"

Yao Yuan didn't stop to wait for Zhang Heng. "This is the creator's particle's biggest weakness. Of course, we have to be thankful that this technology has such a weakness, or we would've all been dead from body shutdown when we came near the junkyard. However, this limitation has landed us in our current conundrum.

"When we were first attacked, I didn't think so much of it, but

after you told me about the alien's origin, I came away with a nagging thought. How does this alien command so many monsters? If it's like what you said, the alien exists as a form of central consciousness, then how could it manage the battlefield from so far away, bypassing the field of the creator's particle?"

The more Yao Yuan thought about it, the more his face sunk. After some time, he continued, "Therefore, I came up with a hypothesis. If this alien on Moon 2 is mentally linked to each of the monsters, it is highly probable that this linkage is via something like a brain wave. Just like how our body motion is determined by a thought, the actions of these monsters are also controlled by the main body's thoughts. Of course, for us, our brain and body are interconnected, but for the alien, its brain and units are completely separated. This may sound improbable, but it is definitely not impossible."

Zhang Heng's expression also dimmed when he thought about what Yao Yuan said. "In other words, the alien on Moon 2 already knows about what's happening here?" Zhang Heng asked carefully.

"I believe so... But we better test it out first."

Then they found themselves at the war room. Inside were seated all the Black Star Troopers, authorities from the 3 bodies, Guang Zhen, and the battalion commanders who had just returned from the surface.

Yao Yuan quickly got everyone updated on the bio lab's development. Then he revealed his hypothesis to the room. He said, "Therefore, I suspect things are going to get harsh. The 7

battalions aboveground, you must keep the surface entrance protected. I'll provide all the weapons and support you'll need to make this happen," Yao Yuan ordered.

The battalion commanders stood up in unison, "Sir, yes, Sir!"

Yao Yuan then turned to the Black Star Troopers and scanned the members. "Xiao Niao, Qiu Qiu, Dan Dan, and Ying, I want the four of you to get into a Space Combat Jet Prototype 003 immediately to conduct a thorough scouting around this planet. After making sure the planet is safe, I need you to move into space. The distance covered I'll leave it to your discretion, but stay away from Moon 2's orbital range, because I fear there are anti-air measures. The scouting will last for 3 hours, and I'll see you back at the Hope after the 3 hours.

"Ying will be the leader and Xiao Niao will be the sub-leader and temporary strategist. Now, it's..." Yao Yuan looked at his watch. "3:27 PM. I want a detailed scouting report at 6:35 pm. Dismissed."

Ying saluted and left the room without a word. An excited Xiao Niao, Qiu Qiu, and Dan Dan moved to follow.

Yao Yuan then turned to Guang Zhen. "Ol' Wong, I'll leave the surface defense to you. If I'm not mistaken, we'll be facing a grand assault soon. It's hard to tell how many there will be, but should it come to a dire situation, I need you to secure the area until the Hope manages to lift into the air."

Guang Zhen saluted, but he added, "Reporting, Sir. The defense

unit might be assaulted by monster air force, and if those flying monsters are shielded, we will suffer a great loss."

Yao Yuan responded immediately, "If they send an air force or a giant monsters appear in the sky, I'll personally lead the troopers to intercept them!"

Guang Zhen continued, "Reporting, Sir. If there're shielded long-ranged artillery monsters, the defense unit too will be cornered. Therefore I request 1 unit of Black Star Troopers to assist the defense unit as back up!"

Yao Yuan did some mental calculations. The Hope still had 120 plus healthy Black Star Troopers. Even though they had proven themselves to be incredibly powerful on land, their true prowess would be shown when they were behind the combat jet. 120 plus jets might be too few to stop the monster army that Yao Yuan predicted the alien would send through space, but...

"Fine. I'll leave 9 troopers with you, so you must protect the temporary base until the Hope manages to lift up! I'll give you full command over the defense unit! Should the base fall..." Yao Yuan let the threat linger.

"My head will come meet you in a box!" Guang Zhen replied seriously.

"I don't want your head, I want you to defend the base with your life!" Yao Yuan scolded.

"Yes, Sir!"

Yao Yuan finally turned to the rest of the troopers. "Other than the 4 scouts and the 9 who will be tasked with assisting the surface defense unit, the rest of you are allowed to move freely, but only within the Hope's fifth level. You're not to reveal the battle plan to anyone else. Be prepared for combat orders. Dismissed!"

Even though the details weren't leaked to the public, the Hope's atmosphere was charged with tension. Other than preparation for warp, almost all other projects were stopped. The general public was asked to remain in their residences. The excavation team was requested to increase their speed. With both anti-gravitational units and electromagnetic shield in place to further the excavation progress, the Hope should be able to lift up into space within the next 72 hours.

At that time, 4 Space Combat Jet Prototype 003s flew into the planet's sky.

The 4 jets were tailored for the Homo Evolutis, and each had a creator's particle isolator. They controlled their speed to fly in a parallel group so that everyone remained within each other's isolator range to maintain constant communication with one another.

Ying kept using his seeker power to alternately scan the air and the ground. Suddenly, a voice came from his communicator. "Ying, you actually don't need to waste your power to observe the ground..."

After a short silence, Ying admitted, "You're right. You don't need the seeker's power to see that."

Below them, an army of several million monsters was marching towards the temporary base like an undulating sea. It looked like they intended to cover the whole planet.

Xiao Niao's voice came through. "Instead of observing the ground, let's find out where's the monsters' base on this planet."

Ying asked in a surprised voice, "But how do we do that? Almost the whole planet's surface is covered by the monsters, so it'll take too much time. Let's not forget we still need to scout around in space."

Xiao Niao continued matter-of-factly, "That's totally par the course... After we scout through space, if we are to follow where the stream of monsters fall, I'm sure we'll be able to locate their base!"

"...that's true. Right, let's also attack one or two monsters to test their offensive and defensive capabilities. This is all useful information."

Under Ying's guidance, the 4 jets increased speed to fly beyond the planet.

Back at the base, there were only about 3 battalions-worth, or

1,500 soldiers, guarding the perimeter. This was because the defense was done in shifts. To preserve the soldiers' stamina across what would be a drawn out battle, this was the best course of action. Of course, the shuttles couldn't offer the same amount of comfort as the Hope, but they were on the battlefield, so it was already as good as it could possibly get.

9 troopers followed behind Guang Zhen as he surveyed the base. Guang Zhen had the intention to ask for all of the Black Star Troopers to stay, but he knew that the Hope had more of a disadvantage in space than on land.

Therefore, he only selected Zhang Heng, Ye Mu, and 7 Survivors who were also veterans as his choices.

Guang Zhen continued his patrol, but suddenly Zhang Heng sucked in an audible sigh. Guang Zhen turned around immediately, asking, "What's wrong? Is there danger?"

Zhang Heng offered, "Yes, many dangers incoming!"

Guang Zhen took in a deep breath and then yelled into the communicator that was within the space armor, "This is your commander, Wong Guang Zhen. Initiate red alert! I repeat! This is your commander, Wong Guang Zhen. Initiate red alert!"

Flashing red lights appeared all over the base and an ear-splitting siren sounded as well.

The camp was on highest alert! Combat was expected to occur in the next several minutes!

Chapter 160: The Mother Nest!

"...thus concludes everything we know so far. Of course, not to be forgotten are the contents of Zhang Heng's dream. I know it sounds ridiculous to treat one's dream as reliable information, but Zhang Heng is our ship's most powerful Diviner, so I have full faith in the power of his dreams."

Compared to others who had isolated orders, Yao Yuan as the captain, major, and the highest commander of many different bodies had to oversee many things.

War is different from a street fight. Many diverse elements play into the inner workings of a war. Even a street fight requires careful planning involving fighter numbers, weapon, retreat routes, and so on, much less an actual war. Even though the Hope had a small army, it had all the necessary departments responsible for surveillance, logistics, equipment, and militia. When all of the departments were mobilized, it required a sound mind to organize them all.

Furthermore, none of the 120,000 citizens on the Hope was an empty burden. Even though not everyone might prove useful at the front line, the Hope was not lacking in experts on surveillance, logistics, equipment, and militia. They formed the Barracks' general staff.

Other than military affairs, there were also civil affairs, like the excavation above the Hope and public appeasement. Granted Yao Yuan had received help from the Hall of Communications, he still had to personally handle many things. He spent about 10 minutes

finishing up all these things.

Then he rushed to a large, fifth floor conference room. He needed expert opinions from the scientists and researchers that had gathered in the room.

After Yao Yuan revealed everything that he knew, a contained commotion erupted. The room was obviously affected by the contents of Zhang Heng's dream.

A scientist raced to the speech button, asking hurriedly, "Captain, you mean the creature on Moon 2 increases its technology and army strength by absorbing other civilizations?"

Yao Yuan nodded gravely. "Yes, that's right. I know it's hard to believe, but we've stumbled across so many impossibilities already, so why not this one?"

A warfare specialist also pressed to speak. "Captain, if Zhang Heng's dream is true and the alien main body is linked to its creations, then it will know about the presence of the alien plant. This means we have a war on our heels."

Yao Yuan chuckled dispiritedly. "That's right. The alien plant allows the alien to perform a super evolution. Furthermore, since our technology is also greater than the alien's, I doubt it would mind consuming us as well. Based on these 2 observations, there is simply no way it would leave us in peace. We have sacrificed many to get our hands on the technology inside the junkyard, but now we are the junkyard for that alien."

Yao Yuan sighed but quickly collected himself. "In other words, war is imminent. I've gathered everyone here to hear the brightest minds on the Hope out. Is there anything we can do to exterminate the alien on Moon 2? Professor Ivan and Mitsuda, you've done many experiments on the aliens. On Planet Sahara, the alien plant was taken out by a common Earth plant virus; could the same be replicated here?"

Ivan laughed sadly, but before he could speak, Saburo stood up. "Captain, since this is my expertise, the field of pathology, let me answer your question... Unfortunately, the same method will not work because this organism represents a perfect cell."

Yao Yuan frowned. "There is no perfection in this world! It is impossible for an organism to be immune to every single virus and bacteria found across the cosmos. Something must be wrong with the experiments!"

Saburo smiled despondently. "Captain, I too hope that the results of my experiments are wrong, but after hearing you describe Zhang Heng's dream, I'm certain of the fact... that even though natural perfection might not exist, relative perfection is definitely possible.

"There is a row of DNA inside this organism's cell that is uncoded. When the organism comes into contact with an unknown virus or bacteria, the cell will code a previously discovered antibody. If the protein doesn't work, the row of uncoded DNA will tweak the formula of the amino acids slightly. Even if the newly formed antibody still doesn't work, the adjacent cells will

receive the tried formula as some sort of a dying message. Utilizing a trial-and-error concept, it'll eventually form a usable antibody.

"This is why," Saburo lowered his head, "we are unable to completely kill this organism. Unless there is a supervirus that could infect all of the cells within a short period of time, nothing will work. A slow-working virus will allow the organism time to eventually code immunity against it. It is, as I've said, a perfect cell."

Yao Yuan too was at a loss for words. They had run out of options. Both H-bomb and the Genesis would take too long, and the alien plant was of no use...

Did they have no other choice but to warp out of there?

Then a few soldiers rushed into the room and whispered into Yao Yuan's ear. Yao Yuan nodded slightly before announcing, "Ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately, our prediction is correct. About 5 minutes ago, a large army of alien monsters was found above the temporary base. There are more than a million of them."

The room rustled in panic. It was so chaotic that no one was paying attention to Yao Yuan.

Frustrated, Yao Yuan slammed his hand on the podium, sending the room into silence. Then he added, "But please don't worry, because at least we have the technological upper hand. Furthermore, we have built a concrete base, so as long as we have enough energy and ammo, we should be fine. We've hunkered

down around a small base, limiting our area of vulnerability, so their numbers advantage shouldn't be that worrying.

"Here are my orders: first, the experiment on the alien cells must continue. I believe firmly that there is no perfection in space. There must be a weakness to this alien, and I want the Academy to find it for me...

"Secondly, the speed of excavation must increase. If necessary, I'll allow the use of the Hope's main cannon to help the excavation. As long as it won't result in the Hope getting buried, I'll allow any desperate measures...

"Then, for the Barracks, we need a steady replenishment of ammo and explosives. Also, we need to have mechanics at the ready to repair any damages to the space combat jets..."

Yao Yuan finished everything he wanted to say. After a pregnant pause, he looked at everyone gathered there. "Pray to your gods and ancestors for their blessings. Pray that this possible home planet will not be taken away from us...

"I'm sorry, but if there is no other choice, I'll have to warp. Yes, a possible home planet is very important, but the safety of the entire human civilization is even more important. Therefore, if you wish to breathe clean air freely under a blue sky again, devise a plan to get rid of these alien monsters!"

When Yao Yuan was busy coordinating the military logistics, Ying's team, who had been out for only half an hour, came back

with harrowing news.

"What! The giant organism on Moon 2 is detaching itself? It gave up on Moon 2 and is heading towards us now?"

Yao Yuan was in utter disbelief, but he had to accept the truth after witnessing the pictures taken by the combat jets. The slice of alien that covered almost half of Moon 2 was curling off of the land. It was rolling into a sinewy meat ball, preparing to depart.

Its destination was obvious...

The main body intended to land directly on the planet to absorb the Hope entirely!

"Not only that, on the way back, we stumbled across many space-surfing alien monsters... they could travel through space, and even though they were slow, clunky, and fragile compared to our combat jets..."

Ying's face fell, adding, "There are too many of them; it's easily more than ten million!"

Chapter 161: The ECS System!

Yao Yuan scanned through the pictures brought back by Ying's scouting team one more time. The alien main body that was previously spreading itself to cover Moon 2 was unfurling at record speed. As it layered upon itself, the 4 reactors showed signs of charging up. It was obvious that it was leaving Moon 2.

Simultaneously, in the space between the planet and Moon 2, especially around Moon 2, was a dense crowd of flying monsters. The monsters had both giant fleshy wings and an opening on their back for a stream of corpuscular flux. It seemed like they had the ability of flight both in space and within the ozone.

Captured in some of pictures was the combat between the space jet and the alien monsters. Like other aliens that they'd seen, the flying monsters were covered with an exoskeleton and looked grim and ferocious. While their bodies were only 8 to 9 meters tall, their wings extended to more than 20 meters wide. Their flight speed was unknown, but it was obvious that they were much slower than the space jets. The fact that they weren't electromagnetically shielded also made them easy targets for the combat jets.

The 4 space combat jets cut through the ranks of flying monsters easily. Due to time constraints though, they didn't wander deep into the monster army.

"This thing here is what worries me," Ying said while pointing at an oval-shaped meat blob that hid behind the frontline. "At the interval of about every 10,000 monsters, there will be one such blob. The thing is about several hundred meters long and I believe

it has a similar purpose as those electromagnetic shield generating monsters. And if that's true, the combat capability of our troopers will be greatly hindered."

Looking at the images, Yao Yuan asked suddenly, "Was the ECS system activated? I notice that these are all pictures of close-ranged combat."

Ying was taken aback. "Of course it was activated. That's common space combat rules."

"Is that so..."

Yao Yuan stood up with joy. "Our minute technological advantage might tip this war to our favor! There's still hope, Ying!"

Very quickly, Yao Yuan gathered all of the Black Star Troopers at the Space Combat Jet Prototype 3s' hangar. The combat jets were all ready. A space war was going to start.

"...There's no time to waste. Everyone here knows how much is at stake. If we fail, our families, friends, future generations, and the entire human civilization will end up as alien nutrients!"

Yao Yuan stared down from his vantage point at the podium. 120 plus troopers stood at attention. Each was armed with standard trooper equipment, fitted space armor, Gaussian rifle, and a sawblade strapped to their waist.

"Remember to activate your ECS system before entering combat. Based on our observation, our enemy doesn't have access to this technology, so they will only realize our presence when we're awfully near. Therefore, we'll be depending on a guerrilla tactic for this battle. Hit hard and hit fast. The moment your target is struck, get out of its detection range! Rinse and repeat!

"Let's save humanity! Move out!"

The ECS system was also known as the invisibility tech. Unlike Earth's camouflage, the ECS enables actual invisibility by refracting the light source that enters one's eyes. It was a 4th revolution technology.

As mentioned above, invisibility didn't mean actual disappearance. It was all light manipulation. One's presence will still be exposed if scanned using powerful optical radar systems. Therefore, the ECS system had to be paired with creator's particles. With creator's particles blocking the radar system, the ECS system could provide substantial invisibility. This technology completely invalidated a warship's main cannon, making skirmishes between mobile engines that much more important.

This ECS system was also inherited from the junkyard. In fact, when the AI ambushed the Hope, it had used the ECS system to cloak the battleship piece!

Since the alien didn't know about the ECS system, this meant that it was open to ambushes from the Black Star Troopers. Similarly, after the Hope lifted up into space, it could activate its ECS system to escape detection. Furthermore, since the alien

monsters had no ECS system, the Hope's long-ranged weapons weren't at all hampered!

The Hope could provide a warship's worth of long distance support! After a series of bad news, Yao Yuan was immensely relieved to finally hear some good news. After the Hope lifts into space, it will be easy to squish the meat blob into a meat pie!

It was as Yao Yuan thought, even a small technological difference could mean life or death in space!

Back at the base, Guang Zhen used his military-grade binoculars to scour the sky above them. Even the horizon was packed with a sea of monsters; there was not even any breathing room available. Other than the monster types that they had already encountered in their previous skirmish, there were a lot more weird-looking monsters.

One of them crawled on 6 legs and had a tube-like extended neck. It had not a head but a pair of eyes that blinked at the end of its long neck. The monster was 5 to 6 meters tall and more than 10 meters long. It easily dwarfed the other monsters on the field. It was a cannon monster.

Another monster was awashed in black. However, unlike other monsters that had shell-like exoskeletons, this monster's black outer shell had a metallic sheen. Like a centipede, it was segmented and had appendages that extended underneath the many segments. At the forefront was a pair of pincers that surged with electricity. It was not tall, only several meters in height, but it was about 8 meters long. Its looks alone could inspire fear in one's

heart.

Other notable monsters included the long-barrel-at-the-chest monsters that appeared in the previous battle. The long barrels could shoot Gaussian bullets, and compared to last time, there were a lot more of them this time.

Similarly, the small foot soldiers and giant electromagnetic shield generating monsters also increased in numbers. Collectively, they gushed towards the base like a tsunami.

Guang Zhen breathed in deeply. He hugged himself closely, saying to no one in particular, "This is so weird. Why they aren't attacking? If I had known that it would be so complicated, I would have asked Yao Yuan for a Thinker..."

"...Sorry, can't help you there."

Guang Zhen turned to see Ren Tao saunter lazily out of one of the transport shuttles. Even though there was a distance between them, thanks to the internal communicator within the space armor, the troopers were able to communicate with each other easily. The whole base was in the creator's particle isolator's range, so this line of communication wasn't affected.

Ren Tao dragged himself to stand beside Guang Zhen with reluctant steps. He surveyed the army of monsters that had them at a chokehold, observing. "Unfortunately, I'm still unfamiliar with how to pilot the combat jet, so Yao Yuan left me behind."

Guang Zhen, though, rejoiced. "That works out just fine. To fully understand the complicated wartime state of affairs, we need a Thinker like yourself... So looking at all these, anything come to mind?"

Ren Tao glanced sideways at Guang Zhen and shrugged. "I told you, I have no clue why they aren't attacking... But if I have to guess, they are waiting for something."

"Waiting for what?"

The puzzle attracted not only Guang Zhen's attention but also Zhang Heng's, who stood beside him. Even the other troopers moved closer despite the fact that they were already in hearing range.

"Who knows, maybe they're waiting for the battle horn."

Ren Tao, though, disappointed them with a non-serious answer. Right then, several combat jets flew up into space from the opening. The moment they hit open air, light waves twirled around them, eclipsing their presence, leaving only their smoke trails behind.

At the same time, the line of alien monsters roared in response. Numerous monsters started charging towards them. The cannon monsters hunkered down for impact as bombs were lobbed into the sky one after another. It was clear that these were not Gaussian bombs, because the soldiers were able to follow their trajectory. They arced beautifully through the sky until...

A series of explosions erupted several thousand meters around the base. The bombs were traditional explosive blast weapons!

"I believe that qualifies as a battle horn," Ren Tao commented lightly.

Guang Zhen had no time for his snide comments. He yelled, "Support battalion, prepare your weapons! Let some of the enemies through. 10 seconds later, bombard the horizon with a Gaussian carpet bombing!

Let's make these alien filths eat some shrapnel!"

Chapter 162: Mankind's First Space War!

As 120 plus Space Combat Jet Prototype 003s zoomed into the sky, the heart of every single pilot was beating extraordinarily fast.

This wasn't completely the fault of their nerves; it was partly caused by the increasing g-force. The g-force should have rendered these pilots dead as the combat jet prepared for lift off, but thanks to their restructured DNA, the Homo Evolutis managed to adapt to the electromagnetic growth field that neutralized the g-force.

3 combat jets formed an echelon. Basically, the members of each echelon had to know one another well from their training days. Of course, there were also newbies from the second batch of Homo Evolutis that had received minimal training. Their training was supposed to last for another 2 years before they could be sent into actual combat.

However, due to desperation, they had to be sent out.

Yao Yuan, though, had faith in them because the Homo Evolutis had a natural affinity for 3-D space combat. This affinity was normally hidden but would reveal itself when forced. That was why Yao Yuan wasn't reluctant to ask them to go into war.

Nevertheless, to prevent unnecessary deaths of these valuable assets, Yao Yuan had given them a specific order: to not engage with a large group of monsters. The newbies were tasked with handling small clusters of monsters that had unfortunately strayed from the army. Instead of initiating guerilla tactics, they were

asked to take care of the easy pickings.

Yao Yuan's combat jet sped to an acceleration of 30 kilometers per second in a matter of 10 seconds, and his speed was still increasing.

According to the scientific knowledge of the 3rd revolution, g-force created from such acceleration could easily tear him apart, but the 4th revolution had brought along the electromagnetic growth field to nullify the large g-force. It made high-speed combat possible.

Yao Yuan had no time to chew over the scientific theories because before long, he found himself surrounded by the inky space. By then, Moon 2 had rotated to the other side of the planet, so Yao Yuan quickly steered his combat jet to the back of the planet.

"This is Yao Yuan. Everyone, activate your ECS systems, but stay on alert. Watch out for your own echelon members. We will come into contact with the monster army any time now!"

Yao Yuan used his Anima power to communicate with everyone.

The troopers arranged into their own separate echelons following Yao Yuan's order. It was noticeable that most troopers found themselves at the back lines being led by the Black Star Unit because they were newbies whose main purpose in that battle was to provide support fire.

Then Moon 2 and an army of monsters appeared before their eyes. A giant swarm of flying monsters crowded around a ginormous meat ball as it floated away from Moon 2. The meat ball had a diameter of more than several thousand meters and was covered with a layer of sticky collagen. Using the particle flux that came out of its back, it floated lazily towards the Hope's planet.

"...this is their carrier army? God damn, there are so many of them!"

This was the alien advantage that Yao Yuan was worried about, a staggering advantage in numbers! Unlike the Hope, who barely managed to scrounge up 5,000 combat personnel, the alien mother nest was able to continuously incubate monsters to add to its army's numbers. Furthermore, these monsters could survive on only water and nutrients taken directly from the ground. They needn't meat to survive. The nest also contained 4 polymerized reactors to provide it with sufficient energy to support such a large army.

"...Looks like we won't be able to stop the alien's main body even if we clear the alien monsters. They're like cannon fodder..."

Yao Yuan's heart sunk. Regardless, he steered the troopers into war. The least they could do was to shred the amount of monsters, easing the tension on Guang Zhen and hopefully able to stall time for the Hope to lift off.

The formation of one particular echelon was particularly close when compared to everyone else. They were Xiao Niao, Dan Dan, and Qiu Qiue.

"...Xiao Niao, this enemy is the Zerg, right? No matter how you look at it, they have an uncanny resemblance to the Zerg," Qiu Qiu asked through his communicator, since their close distance meant they were in each other's isolator range.

Xiao Niao looked out his jet window and replied after a long time, "Yup, it's the Zerg."

Dan Dan chimed in, "Then... what about that ZERO? Didn't he say he will let us see the real Zerg with our own eyes? Do you think..."

Xiao Niao had gotten more introspective. He then nodded. "Yes, he did say that... But before we can get a clear handle of things, let's keep this ZERO thing to ourselves."

His friends agreed without hesitation. Xiao Niao added, "It's not that we're purposely lying, but this whole situation is just too freaky. There are truly too many mysteries surrounding the Hope. Regardless, I'm sure this will play heavily into humanity's future, so if possible, we need to get into a negotiation with ZERO without incurring his enmity."

Dan Dan asked, "What negotiation? Is this still about how you lost at Star Craft?"

"Of course not!" Xiao Niao scoffed jokingly in spite of himself. "We need to find out a few things from him. First, whether he can control the space warp exit. Second, how could he know we'll run

into a Zerg-like alien here, and lastly... what is his true identity?"

Suddenly, Yao Yuan's voice appeared in their ears.

"Every trooper prepare for combat. Remember our plan. The veteran echelons will initiate the guerrilla tactics while others provide support fire.

"Entering combat in 5 seconds.

"3, 2, 1..."

With Yao Yuan leading, his comrades, Ying and Ebon, shot into a monster ensemble of about 2,000 in size. The monsters were spooked by the ambush. In between flashes of lightning and fire, Yao Yuan's echelon broke through the enemy ranks. They had fired more than 100,000 Gaussian bullets!

This was the specialty of light Gaussian weaponry, they could fire rounds quickly and the bullets travelled fast. A normal Gaussian rifle could fire more than 10,000 bullets within a second, much less a Gaussian Gatling cannon.

The layer of monsters at the front was shredded into pieces, and the layer of monsters behind them also fell to the stray bullets. Even the giant meat ball was punctured with bullet wounds. When the remaining monsters realized that they were being attacked, Yao Yuan's echelon was already miles away, hidden by the ECS system.

The assault continued. More echelons immersed into the guerrilla combat while other newbie troopers stood at about several thousand kilometers away, focusing their fire at the spots of carnage. Thankfully, their Gaussian bullets traveled so fast that the monsters were hit before they could even evade. The first skirmish ended up with more than 10,000 monsters being killed, more than 2 oval meat blob demolished, and with nary a scratch on the troopers.

"Wonderful! Keep this up! Let these monsters know they've messed with the wrong civilization!"

"Spread into independent combat until the monsters in this area are cleared!"

Each echelon then scattered into individual combat.

Since they had the complete advantage with the ECS system, it was a one-sided massacre! Even the newbie troopers were getting excited as the amount of monsters they fell increased. They gradually got the hang of piloting the combat jets and their initial jitters peeled away...

However, Yao Yuan was assaulted with omens of danger. It didn't spell immediate danger, but it felt like the alien would decipher and negate the ECS system soon. If that were to happen, the 120 troopers would in turn become easy pickings for the several-million-sized alien army.

"Hopefully the Hope will be able to reach space before then, or else..."

Yao Yuan didn't have the intention to finish the thought. Instead, he threw himself into another fight, wiping out a meat blob and the monsters around it...

The war was boiling down, and mankind had the obvious advantage!

Chapter 163: The Awakening

Bo Li was burning with agitation!

But she had no idea where that agitation came from. Even though she usually presented an indifferent front, it didn't mean that she was unfeeling. Her natural temperament coupled with her history had forced her to keep her emotions to herself.

But at the end of day, she too was one made of flesh and blood...

In her flustered state of mind, she had made multiple mistakes in her readings. It had gotten so obvious that almost everyone else in her lab had noticed it. However, because she was the leader of the lab, nobody dared to confront her.

Bo Li kept trying to pin down the source of her frustration; was it the alien or the Hope's state of emergency? Both seemed close, but neither appeared to be the source. Like a star missing a corner, she got increasingly restless to a degree where she wanted to scream out loud.

"Professor Bo Li. Professor Bo Li."

A voice beside her called softly. It pulled her back to reality and she replied faintly, "Yes, is the data out?"

The assistant quickly answered, "Yes, Professor Bo Li, data from the large particle accelerator is back. It is as expected: it's

extremely unstable, and it'll explode in less than a minute."

"Thank you." Bo Li frowned as she accepted the data report. Suddenly, the world around her became quiet and the familiar mumblings appeared beside her ear. They excited many new fresh ideas in her mind.

Half a minute later, Bo Li relaxed the lock in her brow, saying, "Double the output of the supermagnetic attenuator, and add magnetized alloy to material compartment C. Also, here..."

Bo Li was struck by a thought and stopped mid-sentence. The assistant waited for her continue, but after an extended period of silence, he lifted his head to look at her with questions in his eyes.

Bo Li had her head lowered and was deep in thought. Finally running thin on patience, the assistant coughed lightly to bring Bo Li out of her reverie.

"The solution is so close, but I'm still missing a key component," Bo Li uttered after she came to.

"Have you reached a breakthrough with regards to this research, Professor Bo Li?" the assistant implored.

"No... It has more to do with a plan to defeat the alien..."

Bo Li reentered her contemplation. Suddenly she stood up. "I need a Thinker's help to figure out this plan. We need this plan to

beat the alien." Before anyone realized what had happened, she was already out the door.

After a short while, the assistant caught up to her, saying, "No, Professor Bo Li, you're a Whisperer! You're not allowed on the battlefield! Marshal law states that very clearly. You'll end up at the military court!"

However, when she thought of the planet that would come with this victory, her agitation and worry melted away to be replaced by a sense of joy...

"It's fine. It's all for the sake of victory. I so wish to see the ocean again..."

Bo Li balled her hands tightly as she told herself that.

It didn't take long for Bo Li to reach the hangar. When she arrived, several military figures were already there. From their expressions, Bo Li knew they were waiting for her.

A European soldier stepped forth to intercept Bo Li. He saluted. "I'm sorry, Professor Bo Li, but according to the law, personnel that haven't received official military training are not allowed on the battlefield under all circumstance. Violators will be jailed for 3 to 10 years. The case will be brought under the military court, so there will be no civil course of action, and convicts can only be pardoned by those above the ranks of major. If you are determined to pursue this foolish action, we are given the permission to forcibly put you into custody until the war's over, so please...

Professor Bo Li, let's not make this hard for all of us."

Her agitation long gone, Bo Li replied calmly, "I've figured out the key to winning this battle, but it is a plan that I can't complete alone. I need the help of a thinker, and if my information's correct, Ren Tao is up there acting as the strategist. Don't you want to win this war? To save this possible home planet..."

The European soldier interrupted her. "I'm sorry, Professor Bo Li. We're in the middle of a war, and as soldiers, we're bound to the military law. We can't waive it for anyone... Furthermore, the alien's technology is currently lower than our's, but their method of research is different. If you're... forgive me for saying this, absorbed by the alien during combat, it'll be indefinitely harmful to mankind! There's no way we'll allow you to go up there."

Bo Li lowered her head and mumbled, "Is that so? Such a shame..."

The soldier smiled kindly. "Then please return to your lab. Leave the actual combat to us soldiers, but of course, we won't be successful without the Academy. So please continue to design helpful weapons to aid the combat..."

"Voice activation, PM Original Prototype, Password 0316121. My orders... Incapacitate everyone in this area."

"YES!"

A section of the hangar wall moved to reveal an opening. Everyone was shocked because no one knew of its existence, but more shockingly, an alien robot floated out from it!

Yes, a fully functional, tentacles flaying, floating alien robot, the exact one that massacred the Hope years ago. The robot floated obediently to rest beside Bo Li, but one of its tentacles kept sparking threateningly.

"Professor Bo Li, this... you've fully recovered an alien robot? What's the meaning of this..."

Before the soldiers could recollect themselves from their daze, tiny, metallic needles sprayed out of the robot's tentacles. The soldiers fell to the floor fully paralyzed.

"Sudden high-voltage shock. Don't worry, it's non-lethal; it'll only incapacitate you for half an hour. Rest well," Bo Li whispered after she squatted down beside the European soldier. Then she raced to the spacesuit storage room, the robot following her closely behind.

The European soldier opened his mouth to mutter something, but the paralysis was too strong. Bo Li, though, had the presence of mind to turn around and add, "I'm a Whisperer, so don't be surprised that I know a thing or two about the Hope's mysteries. I might even know more than you do." With that, she excused herself from the area.

After putting on the spacesuit, Bo Li stared at the robot and said,

"So... naturally you'll follow me to the battlefield. But here's an extra order. After you've ascertained that my life signals are gone, destroy my body immediately, especially the brain. Secondly, if I'm captured and there is no chance of rescue, I want you to activate your self-destruct device and search me out. Countdown for self-destruct will be 3 seconds. Please confirm acceptance of orders, PM Original Prototype."

"...YES, orders accepted."

"Okay, then let's get up there."

Bo Li gave a bright smile before it was curtailed by her usual cool expression. She used the robot to hack into the vacuum quarantine room... Since her robot had already been connected to the Hope's central mainframe, Bo Li was one of the few on the Hope who had the main password. In other words, she could use the password to override, restart, or even destroy the systems on the Hope.

Very easily, she went through the many doors and air locks that stood in her way. When the support soldiers arrived at the hangar, she was already on a shuttle heading towards the battlefield.

The battle aboveground was at its height. Gaussian bullets showered down on the battlefield like rain. The power of mankind's 4th revolution was showcased completely!

The enemies, though, were no pushover. The cannon monsters and Gaussian rifle monsters proved to be powerful adversaries. Multiple shots were needed to break their electromagnetic shields.

Therefore, most of the Support Battalion focused their shots on these special monsters. This meant that less support was provided to handle the foot soldiers. At many occasions, it appeared like the temporary base was going to be overwhelmed by these melee monsters.

Thankfully, the base was supported by the 9 troopers. With an ability equivalent to a tank, they rammed through the enemy ranks easily. The sole monster type that provided some resistance was the centipede creatures. However, because their speed was greatly lower than the troopers', with careful planning, the monsters could be taken down easily.

All 9 troopers were short of breath when Ren Tao led them back from another successful assault. They were shocked to see that a shuttle had appeared from the hole and then proceeded to float down towards them.

Ren Tao cursed loudly, "Which idiot picks such a time to come up? If the shuttle is hit in mid-air, it'll crash and destroy part of the base! Go round up its passengers, they're in serious trouble!"

Then Bo Li appeared before Ren Tao with a flustered smile...

Chapter 164: Victory!

"All of the monsters in space have been successfully cleared. I want a quick report on all the troopers."

The space war that lasted 2 hours and 17 minutes concluded with mankind winning. In fact, with the aid of Space Combat Jet Prototype 003, the war was won with relative ease!

Yao Yuan alone took down 574,216 monsters!

In other words, he fell about 60 monsters every other second!

His efficiency was truly magnificent...

Of course, the contribution of the various 4th revolution technologies, like the Gaussian Gatling cannon, electromagnetic growth field, and ECS system on the combat jet couldn't be understated.

As mentioned above, there were zero living monsters occupying the space between the possible home planet and Moon 2. Yao Yuan even led his team to assault the monsters surfing around Moon 2's orbit. The crowd of monsters that were gathered underneath Moon 2's ozone tried providing backup, but after they were annihilated, they learned to stay put.

With these observations, mankind's first space war drew to a close. Even though using the Space Combat Jet Prototype wasn't as

exhausting as using the space armor, after an extended 2 hour combat session, there was no one in the troop that wasn't drained. It appeared like they could lie down and sleep there and then. The results of the war might have changed if the combat had dragged on.

Secondly, even though the Space Combat Jet Prototype 003 was still usable inside the ozone layer, its functionality would be greatly decreased. Due to the air resistance, it couldn't maintain a high speed of 120 kilometers per second. The friction with air might cause the jet's shell to combust.

Furthermore, the effect of ECS system would be greatly influenced by the presence of air. If the combat jet was shot down on Moon 2, the pilot would have crash-landed into a pit of hell.

Due to all these considerations, Yao Yuan ordered for the assault to stop. He wanted the troopers to regroup within each other's creator's particle isolator range to conduct a battlefield update.

"...First echelon here. Suffered no damage..."

"...Second echelon here. Suffered no damage..."

" ... "

"Eighth echelon here. The left wing of the leader's jet was grazed..."

Yao Yuan was pleasantly surprised by how little damage the troopers had suffered overall. Other than a few minor abrasions, the troopers came out basically unscathed after such a long battle. With a smile in his voice, Yao Yuan ordered, "This stage of combat is over. Let's return to the Hope."

Everyone sighed in relief, and it was followed by a rowdy cheer. With Yao Yuan leading the way, they returned safely to the planet the Hope was on...

Things were less optimistic on the ground. After a 2 hour-long battle, the temporary base was ultimately secured with more than 200 soldiers' lives lost and the 9 troopers completely drained. It felt like the war had lasted for thousands of years when the last monster was killed. Many of the Survivors directly passed out and slumped to the floor.

Even Guang Zhen had to try his best to keep his senses together. The base would have fallen into enemy hands if not for his involvement. Even though he was not a Homo Evolutis, he rushed headfirst into combat whenever it appeared like the monsters were about to break through. Guang Zhen knew he had to protect mankind's last line of defense.

Guang Zhen threw himself into combat with the belief that he was not going to return. There were no regrets to his actions because he found it honorable to be able to sacrifice his life to safeguard the longevity of humanity!

Thankfully, as the war milled on, the monster army started to lax in their stance. It was not that they started to fear mankind's

strength, they had no such emotion, but because their numbers started to fall.

This was mankind's battle plan. Even though the alien mother nest could continuously create new monster eggs, the young monsters needed at least several days to mature before they could join the war. Furthermore, the monsters needed to travel the space between the planet and Moon 2 to support their frontline. If this support route was cut off, it was only natural that the numbers of monsters on the planet would start to peter off.

Guang Zhen surveyed the base's surroundings with his military-grade binoculars. He even ordered a few men to survey the lands from the sky using the shuttles. There were no observable living monsters. Finally, Guang Zhen downgraded the red alert to a yellow alert and handed defense of the base to the artillery battalion. The remaining battalions were ordered back to the Hope to receive some well-deserved rest.

"Such a harsh war." Guang Zhen observed with a complicated feeling. The land was pockmarked with craters, and monster carcasses were piled up as high as mountains. Because the monsters could regenerate from a mere cell, the best way to deal with their bodies was fire. Therefore, Guang Zhen ordered his men to burn the nearer carcasses with flamethrowers and the rest with molotovs.

A dilapidated Ren Tao stood behind Guang Zhen when he gave these orders. The rest of the troopers didn't look so dandy either. Their space armors were either chipped or shattered.

This second alien assault was, in terms of scale, much greater than the previous one. The monsters had also gotten more vicious, especially with the addition of the centipede monsters. Their strong pincers could even punch through the space armor. Even though none of the troopers were seriously injured thanks to their impressive reflexes, their broken armor meant they were exposed to the viruses and bacteria in the air.

Ren Tao gazed at the burning mountains of corpses with muted feelings. Then he turned around to face Gaung Zhen. "Then... it's time for us to return to the Hope. If luck would have it, maybe we'll fight alongside each other again."

Guang Zhen understood what he meant. The troopers would now have to be quarantined. Other than studying the alien, the pathology department was still looking for a vaccine for that planet.

Like how it was on Planet Sahara, the germs on this planet might not be as stringent as Earth's Ebola or AIDS, but because of the difference in environment, mankind didn't have immunity against even the common cold virus equivalent of this planet. Of the contaminated soldiers, one had already passed away, and others were still in ICU.

Ren Tao, Zhang Heng, Ye Mu, and the 7 Survivors were about to join their ranks. They too had been contaminated. They would spend the rest of the war in quarantine until they were cured... or until they were dead.

Guang Zhen was at a loss for words; therefore, he gave the

troopers a silent salute. He then watched the 10 brave individuals step onto the shuttle and disappear down the hole.

Bo Li approached him. "I too shall return to the Hope, because plans for the final combat strategy have already been completed. I'm going to go try it out with more analysis and simulated tests."

Guang Zhen looked Bo Li in her eyes and said sternly, "You better prepare to face Yao Yuan first. Do you know how many rules you've broken being here? Who knows how mad he'll be when he hears of this. The least he will do is imprison you."

Bo Li pouted slightly and said calmly, "Does he not need the Whisperers anymore? What else can he do? Hit me? Anyway, I have to go." She turned without giving Guang Zhen another look. Accompanied by a soldier, she too got on a shuttle.

Just as Bo Li's shuttle lifted off ground, about 100 combat jets shot through the ozone layer and seared their trails in the sky. Their speed eased as they got closer to the ground. They were welcomed with a series of cheers when they landed near the hole. The troopers' appearance brought massive relief, and more people finally managed to relax and take a rest.

The second war between mankind and the alien ended...

With a victory for mankind!

But this was not the last time. These two would cross swords...

Chapter 165: A Slap on the Face

Yao Yuan was extremely tired. After all, he hadn't rested since not this latest combat but the one before it. He had stolen some shut-eye here and there, but those were barely enough to keep him fully alert and awake.

The exhaustion piled on to a stage where he couldn't take it much longer.

But take it he must. After he disembarked from the combat jet and entered the Hope, he crossed path with soldiers that also were returning from the temporary base. He didn't stop them to ask for an update but allowed them to continue on to their residences or the canteen. He only requested them to send for their battalion commanders.

"...In other words, more than 200 soldiers died?" Yao Yuan sighed. Suppressing the burgeoning sadness in his heart, he continued, "What about others? Major Wong and the Black Star Troopers?"

A second-lieutenant replied, "Major Wong is still up there taking control of the situation. I don't think he'll be down here any time soon. The troopers... well, the troopers' armor was broken during combat. They were still up there when we came down, but I suspect they'll be here soon."

Yao Yuan frowned, but he didn't pursue the line of questioning. He ordered the commanders to take good care of their soldiers.

Then he rushed to the shuttle hangar. Unsurprisingly, he saw Ren Tao, Zhang Heng, Ye Mu, and the Survivors in the area. They were already in new spacesuits, being readied to be sent into quarantine.

Yao Yuan walked toward the few of them and sighed. "Don't worry, we will definitely manufacture a vaccine. You'll be safe."

Ren Tao shrugged nonchalantly. "Well, death is God's decision... But Yao Yuan, if I die, please spare Chou Yue the details. She has been through enough, and help me take care of her."

Yao Yuan nodded solemnly. "I promise. As long as this ship still runs, she'll be safe."

Ren Tao chuckled lightly. He waved before turning to head towards the 4th floor quarantine rooms. The rest only saluted before walking past Yao Yuan. When they were at the exit, Ren Tao suddenly turned, "Forgot to tell you a good news. Framework for the final strategy has already been done. There're still some flaws, but this is the only plan that I've heard so far that has a chance at beating the alien."

Yao Yuan was stunned before breaking into a huge smile. "What plan is it? Hey, tell me about the plan before you go."

"I'm sure she'll tell you personally. After all, she braved the battlefield just for this." Ren Tao laughed loudly before disappearing down one of the corridors.

Yao Yuan mumbled to himself, "She? Braved the battlefield? What did he mean?"

"He meant me."

Bo Li was in the area when Yao Yuan and Ren Tao conversed, so she overheard everything.

Yao Yuan turned around in shock. He was greeted by Bo Li's empty expression, and his eyes narrowed when he saw the alien robot that accompanied her.

"You just came back from the battlefield?" Yao Yuan asked chillingly.

Bo Li, though, was unfazed. She stared straight ahead at Yao Yuan as she replied, "Yes, I just returned from the battlefield."

"...why were you up there?" Yao Yuan was livid; he was almost shouting at that point. "Don't you know about the marshal law? It's a freaking war up there! Why were you presenting yourself as a gift to our enemy? You should know better!"

Bo Li shrugged. "I needed Ren Tao, who was up there, to help me complete the plan..."

"Don't interrupt me!" Yao Yuan growled. "I'll have you confined! Until the war is over... No, not even then will you be out! You need to learn a lesson! And where are the people watching the shuttles?"

How could they have let you through? I'll have all of them in the military court!"

Bo Li frowned but continued lightly, "You think those people... can stop me from going to the battlefield if I want to go? Plus, I didn't die, did I? Plus, if it's necessary, I'll be doing this again..."

The sound was crisp as Yao Yuan's hand landed on Bo Li's face. The girl froze with her hand unconsciously shielding her face. She didn't cry, but the rims of her eyes were red. After an uncomfortable silence, she forcefully tossed the tapes in her hands to Yao Yuan before turning and saying, "I understand. The confinement rooms are at the 5th floor, aren't they? Don't need to get soldiers to detain me, I'm going." As she walked away, Yao Yuan saw her shoulders shaking and tears falling to the floor.

Yao Yuan wanted to say something and pull her back. However, he sighed before putting his hand down. He waved a patrol over. "Send 4 soldiers to protect her, but make sure they don't allow her back onto the battlefield again. And tell her she doesn't need to be confined and send her to her lab. Also, remember to shut down her robot's power source and get her a pack of ice for her face."

The patrol saluted before running to catch up with Bo Li.

Weighted down by the tape in his hand, Yao Yuan exhaled with frustration as he walked to the war room.

"I'll leave this with you. Start analyzing the details in it immediately. I'll allow the use of our central mainframe because I

need the simulation to be as precise as possible, the password is xxxxx... Wake me up in about 5 hours, and do not disturb me in the meantime. Also, tell Professor Ivan and Saburo to stop working on the aliens and transfer their attention to manufacture the vaccine."

Then Yao Yuan dragged his overworked body back to his room. He had reached his limit both physically and mentally, so he slumbered the moment he hit the bed...

It was a dreamless sleep until a loud groan woke him up. He stretched into a seated position and grabbed the communicator that sat on the table beside him.

Then he heard a female moan. He tensed and leaped out of bed, ready to take down the threat. A second later, he saw the lithe figure that lied in his bed. It was Ji Jie.

Ji Jie was in her undergarments and was sleeping in the fetal position. The groan Yao Yuan heard was probably hers. Yao Yuan stood up and frowned at her sleeping figure.

"...Sigh, I'll have to remind her of this when she wakes up."

Yao Yuan believed that she had ventured wrongly into his room in her tired state. As part of the Black Star Troopers, she must have been incredibly tired after their mission, so Yao Yuan didn't have the heart to wake up her for a talking to there and then.

Yao Yuan retreated to the living room, his communicator in

hand. "This is Yao Yuan. How is the plan coming along? You have all the data tabulated? Wonderful, I'll be there in a minute."

Yao Yuan rushed to the war room. When he arrived, Guang Zhen and many others were already there. "Then let us see the simulation," he announced as he strode into the room.

The expert that stood on stage nodded. "Yes, Captain. This here is the ultimate battle plan provided by Thinker Ren Tao and Whisperer Professor Bo Li.

"...Based on the surveillance data we got before the creator's particles were up, the 4 polymerized reactors inside the mother nest was constructed using cellular restructuring. They're not stabilized in heavy waters like ours. In other words, if we can overload these reactors, the reactors will implode upon themselves.

"Nevertheless, for a creature as big as the mother nest, the implosion of 4 reactors still won't fully devastate it. Based on our findings, the damage won't be great enough to cause it fatal damage; however...

"After the reactors are destroyed, the monster will lose its main source of energy. It'll need 1 hour to recreate a small-sized reactor and 3 hours to create a big one. Before then, it won't have enough energy to conduct space travel."

"And how is that going to help us?" Yao Yuan asked, hoping to get to the point.

The expert pressed something into the panel. A 3d image showed itself in the room. In the image, the mother nest had already lost its 4 reactors and was floating still in space.

"Then, we will launch a giant propeller device into the mother nest. The device will be inserted into the alien body, so the surrounding monsters won't be able to attack it. We'll use the propeller to send the nest into the sun!"

In the image, a rocket-shaped propeller was shot into the nest, pushing it towards the sun.

Yao Yuan's frown deepened as he contemplated over the plan. He shook his head. "This won't work. For one, there will definitely be monsters inside the nest itself. They will demolish the propeller from within. For another, the size of the nest is too big. Even with a high powered propeller, we'll need about 5 hours to send it into the sun. Within the time, it will have reconstructed a new reactor."

The expert tutted, "And this is where the brilliance of the plan shows itself..."

"The surface of the propeller will be covered with a layer of alien plant. No matter whether it is the alien that absorbs the plant or the plant that absorbs the alien, at least several hours will be spent on this altercation. It will delay the mother nest from reconstructing the reactor. This way, we will have enough time to let the propeller reach a sufficient acceleration to complete this plan..."

"A win-or-lose, all in type of ultimate battle plan!"

Chapter 166: Operation Celestial Wolf!

"This is one crazy plan."

Yao Yuan sighed deeply after a 10-minute contemplation.

Everyone knew that after the alien absorbed the alien plant, it would evolve to a super organism, one that could digest everything, minerals, energy... Mankind would truly be hamstrung then.

However, the plan, as crazy as it may seem, was also the only proposed plan that could work...

The alien's strength lied in cellular construction and regeneration. Using a singular cell, it could create a sea of monsters with sufficient nutrients.

The alien had almost absorbed Moon 2, so it shouldn't have to worry about the lack of nutrients. It could produce millions of alien monsters easily. It didn't even have to rely on the monsters to destroy the Hope; it could do that with its enormous size.

Getting into close proximity with the Hope's planet would create such a disturbance in the gravitational fields that it would shred the spaceship into pieces. Unlike the mother nest, mankind couldn't regenerate when damaged.

Therefore, the Hope had to eventually warp or suffer a

monumental loss. Yao Yuan believed there was no third option.

However, the third option had arrived wrapped in a package of craziness. It sounded insane, but it might just prove to be successful!

Simulations from the central mainframe provided 2 possible outcomes. One had a chance possibility of 6.7 percent while the other 92 percent. The biggest key difference was obviously the alien plant. If the mother nest managed to absorb the alien plant in less than 2 hours, it would be able to completely infuse the DNA of the plant throughout the nest in less than 1 hour. It would then use its newly acquired power to digest the propeller. It would escape the fate of being shoved into the sun easily.

However, if the altercation between the two lasted more than 2 hours, the propeller would have reached so much acceleration that the alien wouldn't be able to do anything to stop it. Even if it did end up absorbing the alien plant, it would be too late. Pushed by the inertia of the acceleration and pulled by the gravity of the sun, it would be heading straight for its death.

Of course, there were other minor kinks to work out in the plan. The first was the protection of the propeller before it could get lodged inside the mother nest. A special unit needed to escort the propeller through the monster crowd around Moon 2 as the propeller traveled to its target. The propeller was extremely fragile, so a team of combat jets would have to be deployed to protect it from harm.

Secondly, the 4 reactors within the mother nest had to be blown

up. The combat jets would be needed again. The millions upon millions of monster that guarded the nest would be a high wall to climb. Even Yao Yuan had doubts about whether the combat jets could succeed in this hard mission.

The discussion continued with everyone arguing their thoughts. More data was churned out by the central mainframe, but... the biggest issue was the absence of the plan's original creators. Ren Tao was in quarantine, passed out from fever.

Bo Li had locked herself up in her room and refused to answer to any pleadings and calls. Yao Yuan warned against any efforts to drag her out by force, telling everyone to let her be.

3 hours later, as the Homo Evolutis roused from their slumber, Yao Yuan had decided to carry on with the plan, calling it Operation Celestial Wolf. It was a mission that had humanity's future on the line. If it was a success, they would have themselves a new home planet.

But if they failed, they would have created a space monstrosity and hopefully would be able to warp away before they themselves were absorbed.

"The giant propeller prototype is ready, Sir. It was built using Professor Bo Li's latest set of data. Its speed and acceleration are 10 percent better than normal propellers, but it still has its flaw, the most notable being its instability."

It was one of the scientists from Bo Li's lab that provided the

explanation. He was right that the propeller had some stability issues, but according to the simulations, those issues would only manifest themselves after a 10 hour activation. It was relatively stable within the first 10 hours of its activation.

"This is not the time to be picky; we'll just have to trust this prototype," Yao Yuan said solemnly as he took in the several hundred meters long and 30 meters wide propeller device that took up most of the lab. Compared to the size of the mother nest, it would still be tiny, but it had enough power to pull the plan off. As long as the alien plant wasn't absorbed within 2 hours, victory belonged to humanity!

Then Yao Yuan continued to survey other preparations. To prevent the alien plant from directly digesting the propeller, its surface had to be covered with a thin layer of energy crystal. This too was another lengthy and exhaustive project. The Hope's ready store of energy crystals wasn't large enough to cover the large surface, so they had to use the alien plants to create more.

Then came the modification to the front of the propeller. It needed to be sharp enough to pierce through the mother nest's surface and serrated enough to hook onto its flesh. Furthermore, the particle flux on its combustible end couldn't end up inside the fleshy folds of the alien, or it would affect acceleration.

In the meantime, surveillance on Moon 2 continued. The excavation project had almost reached its end; there was only about 300 meters to go before the Hope could prepare to lift off. For that purpose, the temporary base had to move its location. It was uprooted to a location several meters away from the opening.

That too was a tiring project.

Then, 2 hours before the initiation of Operation Celestial Wolf, the surveillance team on Moon 2 came back with reports on the alien's suspicious developments.

"This is..."

The mother nest on Moon 2 had completely curled into a ball. It looked like Moon 2 had grown a malignant tumor. It was ready to launch into space any time soon.

The surprise, though, was the appearance of a new flesh monster... or rather a flesh warship.

The new monster was more than 1,000 meters long and was shaped like a stick. From the high definition pictures taken of it, almost every corner of its surface was punctured with Gaussian cannon barrels, giving it an appearance of a spindly meat stick. It looked straight out of someone's demented nightmare.

There was more than several thousands of these monster warships, and they were surrounded by a gauntlet of flying monsters.

There were also millions upon millions of those meat blobs. From their previous combat, Yao Yuan knew that the purpose of these blobs was transportation. Each one of them housed about 2,000 monsters. In other words, all of the monsters added up to an

army that could drown out the Hope's planet with just their sheer numbers. Their numbers this round was several times greater than their numbers from the previous 2 wars combined!

"Prepare the whole defense unit! Make sure you have all the necessary weapons, armor, ammo, and batteries!"

Yao Yuan ordered inside the war room, "Stand ready, all Black Star Troopers. We'll be heading out after the combat jets' last check-up. This will be our last stand against this enemy!"

"Everyone, a picture speaks a thousand words, so I implore you to look at this stretch of blue sky, land, and sea! This could be ours... if we win this war. We will disappoint humanity if we fail!"

Yao Yuan roared for inspiration. "So we can only return with victory in our laps! I shall fight until my last breath out there. If I die, you're all allowed to return to warp, but before that, I request that you give this war your all!"

"Guang Zhen, I'll leave the defense of the base to you. When the Hope lifts off, I expect it to be assaulted by the flying monsters, so Black Star Troopers, we have to be ready for that!"

"I need every single Black Star Trooper to be out there! The Hope can only lift off in about 3 to 4 hours, so before then, we have to secure this opening. After lift-off, the combat jets will provide support to the ground unit, so Guang Zhen you better make sure the base holds until then!"

Let's make Operation Celestial Wolf a success!"

Chapter 167: Operation Start!

The lights in Bo Li's room weren't on. She lied quietly on her own bed staring into the darkness, accompanied by the sounds of her own breathing.

There was an apprehension clogging her heart, but she couldn't tell where it came from...

Was it because of her unfinished experiments or miscalculated data? Or was it because of the final plan...

The final plan... Did he accept it? He should be on the space combat jet right now if he did...

Matter of fact, he wasn't. Yao Yuan was actually standing outside her door. The 4 soldiers that were on guard duty saluted when they saw him approach. Yao Yuan returned the salute and said, "It's okay, you guys are relieved of guard duty. As long as she doesn't leave the Hope, she has the freedom to go anywhere she wants..."

After the guards left, Yao Yuan stood transfixed in front of her room door. He didn't make to enter or knock, he just stood there quietly. The guards threw him some questioning gazes, but they didn't dare to comment anything.

"Bo Li, I know you can hear me. I want to apologize... for what happened earlier, but make no mistake, the marshal law still stands. As a Whisperer, you're still not allowed on the battlefield.

You have to understand that if you fall into enemy hands, it will not only harm our winning prospects in this war, it will be a great loss to the Academy..."

Needless to say, Bo Li could hear him clearly. Yao Yuan perhaps didn't realize he was using his Anima power. Bo Li, though, refused to reply. She bit down hard on her lips and could feel tears swirling in her eyes. The feeling of apprehension that was bugging her increased and it suffocated her heart...

(My death... will only be the Academy's loss...?)

"...and..."

Yao Yuan dithered before completing his sentence, weighing what he wanted to say. "...me, it'll be a loss for me too..."

"So please don't take such unnecessary risks again. I will never allow you on the battlefield! But... I remember everything that I've promised you; we'll go to the beach together, go swimming if the sea's safe... and lie on the beach at night to enjoy the night sky. I remember every single promise that I've made, and I always fulfill my words. I'll do my best to keep my end of the bargain, and you have to promise me you'll do the same too..."

Yao Yuan's voice slowly petered away. Bo Li's tears were flowing freely now. She pushed herself up from her bed and rubbed her tears away as she rushed to open the door. There was no one out there anymore.

Even so, she didn't feel disappointed. Instead she felt warmed, intertwined with wisps of bitterness... It reminded her of her favorite tea drink, a light sweetness and warmth that always permeated her body after the initial bitterness.

"Professor Bo Li?" a soldier that passed by asked tentatively.

Bo Li coughed and replied lightly, "Can you accompany me to the lab...? I'm sure that idiot doesn't have the foresight to tweak the propeller to its maximum setting. Let's get to work since we still have time before the operation officially starts."

Yao Yuan saw the tired Guang Zhen off to the temporary base. Guang Zhen would be responsible for holding the safety of the base until the Hope could lift off into space. His order was to not budge from his post under any circumstance, and based on his personality, Guang Zhen would die before he would allow the base to fall.

"Ol' Wong, I'll leave the defense of the surface to you. For the sake of humanity... please do your best." Yao Yuan saw Guang Zhen's diminishing figure and he sent him these parting words through his Anima power.

Without turning around, Guang Zhen lifted his hand and waved before getting on the shuttle.

"Come on, now it's our turn."

Yao Yuan turned to address the gathered Black Star Troopers. The 110 plus troopers included new Homo Evolutis that shouldn't even be on the battlefield. If all the troopers were to be wiped out, humanity would have suffered an indescribable loss.

"I'm not sure whether this will be our last confrontation with this alien, and there are definitely many things humanity still needs to worry about, like the safety of the planet and the well-being of our future generation, but all those things will come after we win this war!

"Let us fight for the sake of humanity, for the sake of future, for the sake of our children, and for a new home planet!"

Then all the Homo Evolutis got on their assigned combat jets. With Yao Yuan leading, they soared through the sky as their ECS systems were activated. Within a blink of an eye, they were already in space.

In front of them was the mother nest that was previously on Moon 2. One had to wonder how such a giant thing had extricated itself from the moon's surface. Currently, it was still in Moon 2's orbital range. Due to its size, it had to contend with Moon 2's gravitational force, so it was travelling extremely slow.

"The first step of Operation Celestial Wolf is to clear out as many monsters as we possibly can. The mother nest requires some time before it can birth new monsters. Therefore, the more monsters we take down now, the easier it'll be for us later. Similarly, we'll be using guerilla tactics. This first step will last for an hour. An hour later, we'll gather at coordinates 3612, 7161, 2351."

Yao Yuan took in a deep breath and led the troopers into the cloud of monsters. The second space war was going to start...

Back at the Hope, Ivan and Saburo were slaving in the biology lab. Their eyes were ringed with black eye from god knows how many sleepless nights. They weren't even given rest when the soldiers came back and went for their forty winks. The 2 of them only managed short naps in between quick meals.

The pressure on them only increased after 20 more infected were sent into quarantine. Among the 20 were Ren Tao and Zhang Heng. One of them was a rare Thinker and the other was the best Diviner. Yao Yuan gave specific orders that they must be saved no matter what.

But it was easier said than done.

It was already a miracle for a planet to be able to support life. However, the evolution of the creatures on it would definitely be different from that of Earth's. The same could be said of its microorganisms. A common virus on this planet might be fatal to humanity because mankind didn't develop immunity against it.

"There's just no way. We've tried all the antibiotics we have. Even the lab rats have entered metabolic shock from ingestion of so many medicines. Obviously, one or more of the virus strands are activated by our antibiotics. Instead of suppressing it, the medicines are activating it." Ivan sighed in defeat.

Saburo glared at the test tubes of samples with bloodshot eyes. The whole situation reminded him of the tragedy that he had once experienced, but as frustrated as he was, he had to concede. "You're right. It would be much easier if there was only 1 virus or bacteria. In that case, we could use the electromagnetic cellular separator, but... these people took in the air of the planet. They were contaminated by a whole bouquet of bacteria and viruses that live in the air. Of the earlier patients, a few of them died from internal bleeding. If the symptoms are the same, this new batch of patients will die in the next 30 minutes."

"Things definitely would be a lot easier if they had been contaminated by one or two viruses or bacteria, but now... I don't think even medical technology from the 5th revolution could save them in such a short period of time..." Ivan concurred.

Saburo balled his fists and growled, "If only there was an immune system that could counter any and all viruses and bacteria... Wait a minute, Professor Ivan! We do have something like that, an organism that has perfect immunity! Yes..."

"We'll use the alien cells to create the vaccine!"

Chapter 168: The Dismantled ECS System

Yao Yuan's combat jet focus-fired on a monster warship. It exploded in a shower of green goo and broken flesh. Some had even splattered on Yao Yuan's combat jet. Yao Yuan wasn't worried, because they weren't corrosive and the ECS system wasn't affected by the appearance of these liquids. It twisted the light around the entire combat jet, including the splattered marks.

Due to the success of their previous war, many pilots, including the new Homo Evolutis, gained confidence this time around. Some of them even conducted the guerilla strike successfully.

The monster army decreased greatly in number. When the troopers went closer to the mother nest, it finally retaliated.

Many small monsters flew out from within the mother nest. Their size and shape suggested that they were still growing and unformed. In fact, they didn't even appear to have combat ability. They floated aimlessly around the mother nest. Before the troopers could give a proper reaction, the monster warships shot at the clot of tiny monsters, taking them down.

This was repeated multiple times, forming a large expanse of monster carcasses around the mother nest.

"What is it doing? Suicide? But why..."

Yao Yuan couldn't understand what was happening, but he knew they didn't have the time to idle. The monster army behind them

was inching closer and closer to the Hope's planet. Yao Yuan had no choice but to lead the troopers onwards.

However, right before they entered the field of tiny monster bodies, a series of conjectures and images flashed across Yao Yuan's mind. He hurriedly used his Anima power to order, "Everyone, spread out!"

Then Yao Yuan's combat jet did a corkscrew spin and turned back the other side.

However, the troopers' locations had already been exposed. More than 10 monster warships aimed their Gaussian cannons at the troopers' general direction and almost instantly, 10 silhouettes of Space Combat Jet Prototype 003s appeared in space. This was the electromagnetic shield in action.

The more responsive among the troopers had followed Yao Yuan out and found themselves safe more than 10 kilometers away; however, the Gaussian cannons weren't slow themselves. Under the focus fire of more than a million Gaussian cannons, about 3 combat jets exploded.

"Damn! They're nullifying the ECS system through this method! How many monsters did they have to sacrifice to make this work?!" Yao Yuan was livid. The 0 fatality rate the troopers had been maintaining suddenly shot up to 3. What was worse was they had to go through the body field and thus expose themselves, or the mission would not succeed!

Yao Yuan sighed and used his Anima power to give a firm order. "Every 3 jets will form a unit. Don't waste time on the monster army heading towards the planet, leave them to Major Guang Zhen and the defense unit. Focus on the mother nest! Keep on fighting until either your jet is damaged or you're incapacitated! Attack!"

Yao Yuan knew full well what his order meant. He had left Guang Zhen with millions upon millions of alien monsters to deal with, and simultaneously, more than half of the troopers might end up dead... However, he knew they had reached a stage of no return. Giving up was not an option!

Yao Yuan roared, pushed his jet to its maximum acceleration, and shot towards the mother nest.

When his jet crossed into the field, the warships trained their cannons his way. Yao Yuan activated all his powers and then his world fell silent.

Yao Yuan felt all the malice that was directed at him, and the dangers warnings crowded his mind. However, he also saw the warship's weakness... There was inconspicuous protrusions on their backs, and every few seconds, they would light up. It should be the monster's power source...

Yao Yuan's combat jet had reached an impressive 150 kilometers per second in acceleration and it was still increasing. It was at a stage where the scenery flew past in a flash even for the Homo Evolutis. Mankind's anatomy was not created to handle super acceleration like this; even with the electromagnetic growth field, it was pushing it.

There were 2 distinct combat jet models. Their maximum speeds were indeed 200 kilometers and 150 kilometers per second, but those numbers, like many numbers in science, were just placeholders...

Generally speaking, the common speed for the combat jet was at 80 to 100 kilometers per second. For many, this would hinder their capability because they wouldn't be able to respond fast enough to issue any attack.

Of course, the Homo Evolutis, especially the Perceptors, Seekers, and Diviners, were the exception. They could rely on their superhuman power to assimilate to such high speed.

Yao Yuan... was activating all his power like how he did on the warship husk when he was confronted by the group of alien robots. Under such a state, his reflex response could only be described as being nonhuman...

100 kilometers per second, 150 kilometers per second, 200 kilometers per second...

Yao Yuan's jet kept climbing in speed. He zipped through space like a flash of lighting. Even though his location was exposed, the monsters couldn't catch up to his speed... He was too fast for the monsters to handle!

He fired off a series of Gaussian bullets.

In less than 10 seconds, he had racked up more than 100 kills. He was unstoppable. He broke through enemy ranks, not caring whether his fellow troopers could even keep up with him. The 4 gleaming spots on the mother nest then came into his vision. Pulsating with a light that was visible to the naked eye, these were where the 4 polymerized reactors were located. Yao Yuan intended to destroy them!

However...

Security around that area was extremely tight. Throngs of monster swamped Yao Yuan's jet when they saw him approaching. They closed in on him from every side.

"Get lost!"

Yao Yuan kept pressing the fire button. One monster after another shattered into pieces, but the space they left behind was quickly taken over by others... There were simply too many of them; it was a number beyond mankind's comprehension...

Yao Yuan's jet shook as it rammed through the wall of monsters and came through the other side. The monsters that stood in the way were shredded into pieces, but his jet was greatly damaged. The front end of his jet started sparking and the jet body was dented in many places. One of its particle fluxes started to flutter before eclipsing. The jet's speed started to take a nose dive...

"Is this the end?"

Yao Yuan clenched his teeth, refusing to back down. He didn't want to die just like that. He wanted to keep fighting to lead humanity to a brighter future. More than that, he still had many places he wanted to see and the people that he wanted to see them with... The girl that he had laid his hands harshly on and the woman that she reminded him of...

"Damaged combat jets, please return to the Hope for repairs. The rest keep on going. Harass the monsters to reduce their numbers!"

Yao Yuan turned to lead about 30 smoking jets back to the Hope. They were going to change for new jets.

On the way back, his mind was fogged by the memory of a girl who stood expressionlessly beside a red-colored combat jet. When no one was looking, she carved her lover's name into the jet's wing...

Chapter 169: Red Lightning!

Everyone mobilized when Yao Yuan reached the jet hangar. He leaped out of his damaged combat jet. Other replacement jets were already sitting at the rails, ready to lift off.

Other Homo Evolutis mulled about in silence, austerity and severity following them like a cloud. Some opted for a cigarette break, while others closed their eyes in meditation. Few stood staring at the Hope's walls as if in a trance. They despaired after the upcoming battle, but they knew they couldn't surrender. If they weren't doing it for themselves, they at least had to do it for their families who depended on the Hope to survive.

Yao Yuan got from the patrols Bo Li's location. He took the electromobile to meet her at the lab. When he arrived, Bo Li was in the middle of a huddled discussion with a group of people. She swore a professional pants suit and black stilettos. She was fully focused in her work, and there was a fiery glint in her eyes.

"Bo Li!"

Bo Li heard the voice that she had been dreaming about call her name. She turned to see a haggard Yao Yuan walking towards her. She felt heat coming up to her face, and for some reason she felt the need to run. She steeled herself and asked as cavalierly as she could, "Yes, why are you here?"

"...Bo Li, my jet has been seriously damaged. I doubt it can be fixed in a short amount of time. I could take some of the other jets,

but they can't catch up to my speed. I need the best, could you give me your original prototype?" Yao Yuan got straight to the point while staring at Bo Li in her eyes.

Bo Li's focus wavered, then she asked concernedly, "Your jet has been seriously damaged... Is the situation on the battlefield bad?"

"It's definitely not ideal." Yao Yuan turned to his watch. "We have another 50 minutes until we launch the propeller, but there is still a giant monster army defending the nest. None of the reactors have been broken, and the enemy has nullified our ECS system. Since we can no longer win with surprise tactics, I need firepower, so give me that prototype!"

Bo Li looked at the man before her. He might be scarily solemn and foreboding at times, but he had a golden heart. Maybe her father was wrong about him...

"The prototype's stationed at the hangar's hidden room. You might not be aware of its existence, so I'll bring you there." Bo Li nodded.

"I know where it is; I've seen you working on the prototype in there." The words stumbled out of Yao Yuan's mouth. Only then did he realize that he sounded like a peeping tom.

Bo Li's face flushed red and kept sending him patronizing gaze. Then the 2 of them walked to the hidden room. Yao Yuan trailed behind Bo Li and neither exchanged a word until they had almost reached their destination when both said in unison, "You...".

Bo Li fixed him a sideway stare and said, "You first then."

"Thank you," Yao Yuan said in a tender voice. "Is your face... still hurting? I'm really sorry for what I did."

"No, it's fine. It has been fully healed." Bo Li shook her head. "How about the combat? Is everything going along just fine for you?"

"It's okay..."

An awkwardness stretched until the hidden room opened, giving them the chance to change topic. Both jogged into the room until Bo Li stopped in front of a metallic wall. She pressed something on it and then the wall slowly moved to reveal a large space with a bright red combat jet as its centerpiece!

"This is the prototype for all the other space combat jets. There are an additional 2 accelerator fluxes and special circuits made using the plant's alloys to increase maximum acceleration. This also affects the efficacy of the Gaussian cannons. They can now fire 1 shot every 2 seconds. Other modifications include a shell with greater tensile strength..." Bo Li launched into her explanation with pride in her eyes.

Yao Yuan too was overwhelmed by the majestic beauty of the combat jet. As Bo Li's continued ramblings streamed into his ears, the weird sensation he previously felt resurged in his heart...

She reminded him so much of "her," pretty, brave, and kind. Bo Li didn't have her cunning, but she had a desolateness that pulled out his protective nature...

"Did you make this specifically for me?" Yao Yuan couldn't help but ask.

"Of course not..."

Bo Li was adamant in her refusal, but when she saw how awed Yao Yuan was by her handiwork, her heart softened and she admitted albeit circuitously that. "Its name is Space Combat Jet Prototype 003 NT Model. It's specifically built for the Hope's strongest Homo Evolutis. Shortened as NT 1, its maximum acceleration can reach up to 700 kilometers per second, 3 times the speed of normal combat jet. With 2 Gaussian Gatling guns and 1 mini Gaussian cannon, its firepower is also 3 times that of the normal jet."

Yao Yuan's mouth curved into a smile. He tousled Bo Li's hair lightly before parting to step closer to the combat jet. He climbed up the ladder to the pilot seat, and when he reached the final rung, he turned around and said, "Don't worry, I promise you I'll be back."

"...I'll wait."

Several minutes later, Bo Li leaned against the Hope's window and saw a red combat jet shoot out into space and then blink out of

her vision. She felt her heart wrench...

Yao Yuan, on the other hand, felt reenergized. The jet was as good as Bo Li said. It was fast, had more weapons, and was equipped with a small reactor to support a more powerful electromagnetic growth field. As aforementioned, every individual's acclimation to the growth field was different. Yao Yuan, as the strongest Homo Evolutis, adapted to it best, allowing him a great increase in response speed.

"NT 1... 3 times the normal speed? Let's try it out! Come, let us show this monster that not everything is its food!"

Yao Yuan couldn't contain his giddiness. Like a flash of red lightning, he broke through the ozone layer and into space.

"She has always been lousy at naming things. Should have just called it Red Lightning..."

NT 1 entered ECS state easily, and before long, it had reached the spot where the 2 forces were clashing at full force. The mother nest had fully disengaged herself from Moon 2 and was moving with increasing speed toward the Hope's planet. Around it, about 100 troopers were locked in deep combat with its defenders. The combat was so rabid that it was visible from a distance away.

Yao Yuan activated his multiple powers once more.

Sensing its pilot's changes, Red Lightning increased in

acceleration. 200 kilometers per second, 300 kilometers per second, 400 kilometers per second...

In a matter of seconds, Yao Yuan moved from the outer ring of the battle into the battle's midst. Yao Yuan announced himself with a series of cannon fires. A warship monster before him crumbled into pieces. Simultaneously, the Gaussian cannon shell blew up another warship monster, shredding it completely. Following the Red Lightning was a sorry trail of alien guts and sinews.

"It's the Captain! The Captain's back!"

"He's so fast, and what is that red combat jet?"

"Great, he took down another warship!"

Everyone cheered, and the morale rose after Yao Yuan demolished another 10 warships. They moved to follow behind Yao Yuan, utilizing the break in the monster's defense Red Lightning had torn.

However, Red Lightning was too fast. Even for Ebon, an experienced Perceptor, he couldn't follow it.

Like an actual lightning bolt, Yao Yuan zapped through the battlefield before the monsters could form a proper defense line. Yao Yuan flew to above one of the 4 polymerized reactors. Underneath the disgusting layer of flesh, Yao Yuan could see the

heat gathering within.

"Let's light it up!"

A fully charged Gaussian cannon's ammo hurtled towards its target in a straight line. When it pierced through the mother nest's flesh, Yao Yuan's Red Lightning was already miles away. Behind him, Yao Yuan felt an explosion radiating the heat and light of a small sun...

There were still 3 polymerized reactors to go!

Chapter 170: Lift Off! The Hope!

After the group of combat jets flew into the sky, the temporary base was on high alert.

However, things appeared to be different this time because even after some time, no monsters appeared. It wasn't until the troopers came back with damaged jets that the monster army materialized in the sky.

"A skydive assault? They think we don't have anti-air weapons? What a bunch of idiots."

Guang Zhen lifted his head and laughed contemptuously, he then asked the soldier beside him, "Are the anti-airs ready?"

"Yes, Sir. We are at full capacity; we could fire at any time," the soldier replied after he scanned the chart he had on his hand.

"Then... fire them all in 15 seconds. Let these filths know that airstrikes have become obsolete due to 4th revolution technology." Guang Zhen lifted his head once more and smiled chillingly.

Indeed, with the arrival of the 4th revolution, the position of air forces had become increasingly awkward.

The key factor was the invention of Gaussian weapons and electromagnetic shields. They pushed out the usage of traditional firearms. Due to carriage issues, the air force didn't have the

ability to carry around reactors in flight. As consequence, they could only support lesser weapons and weaker electromagnetic shields, so they had the obvious disadvantage.

Simultaneously, with the arrival of artillery with high initial speed, air forces' original advantage of speed and height became useless. No matter how high or fast you fly, it won't be faster than a Gaussian bullet that could reach its target in less than a second.

Therefore, after the 4th revolution, war was fought in space or on the planet's surface. On the other hand, because Gaussian bullets traveled so fast, they were weak in long-ranged combat. The incredible air resistance over long distances made it incredibly easy for one to miss one's target.

As the number of black dots increased in the sky, Guang Zhen said into the communicator, "Don't panic, wait for them to come closer, and then we'll strike..."

"...5, 4, 3, 2, 1..."

"Fire!"

With Guang Zhen's command, all of the Gaussian anti-air, like Gatling guns, cannons of varying sizes, and even a Gaussian electromagnetic rail cannon borrowed from the Hope, as well as the rifles of 3,000 plus soldiers, started firing in unison.

The bullets formed a gigantic stream, one that was made of

bullets!

The black cloud above the base started dispersing and monster parts started falling from the sky. The parts that contained metallic substances bounced off the soldiers' electromagnetic shields, nullifying this unique form of hazard.

The monsters' blood fell like rain, washing the floor green. Enclosed within their spacesuits, the soldiers ignored the blood and kept their sights on the sky with determination in their eyes.

Fire, reload, recharge, and then fire...

This lasted for 6 minutes until there was not even a black spot left in the sky. The base was swamped in a sea of guts and blood. Even after they were washed out with the sewer system, there was still an indescribable, fleshy feeling when one walked on the soil in the base.

After losing half of their numbers, the monsters dropped and collected themselves on the ground far away from the base. They formed an army and marched towards the base.

Guang Zhen observed the army through the binoculars and frowned.

The army had decreased in numbers, but the remaining monsters still posed a threat. There were the scorpion monsters in droves, and among them were the electromagnetic shield generating

monsters.

However, the scariest was a 150-meter-tall monster. It was covered in a black metallic shell, stood on 4 elephant-sized legs, and had an 80-meter-long bone blade instead of a trunk. Sparks kept flying over the blade, and there was more than 10 of these monsters!

"Battalion B! Prepare your long ranged weapon! Fire when the enemies are in range! Take down the 10 giant monsters first!" Guang Zhen yelled.

Very quickly, the many Gaussian weapons attached to the turret started charging. After the computer locked down to the target monsters, they fired off instantly. The air shook with the hail of bullets and the air was roiling with dust.

Guang Zhen was pessimistic. He didn't take his eyes off the binoculars, but everywhere he looked, he only saw dust.

"Damn the creator's particles!" Guang Zhen swore vehemently. If there was no creator's particle, all of the surveillance devices would come back online and they could triangulate these monsters from space. That would allow them to strike them from space and remove the need to face them head on.

Suddenly, the ground started to tremble. From the cloud of dust, a monster appeared. It was the giant monster!

The giant monster had around it a layer of sparks that suggested the presence of an electromagnetic shield. Even though it was blinking out, it had survived the weapons' focus fire due to its incredible size since it could store more power to charge the shield. It was still 10 kilometers away from the base, but it exuded an intimidating pressure.

"Fire! Soldiers, don't stop firing!" Guang Zhen yelled and fired his own rifle at the monster.

The other soldiers followed.

Everyone knew if they allowed such a creature to break into the base, the defense would fail immediately. That would in turn lead to lots of death!

Therefore, at that moment, even the most coward of the soldiers unloaded their bullets at the monster!

It exhausted the focus fire of more than 1,000 rifles and the cannons to take down the one giant monster. Its shield died out about 2,000 meters away from the base.

Before the base could sigh in relief though, the ground shook once more. There were 1, 2, 3 no, 5 more giant monsters coming through!

Everyone stared blankly at the monsters with hopelessness in their eyes... The thought was "5 150 meters tall monsters that have

electromagnetic shields; is this war even winnable?"

"Fire! Don't stop!" Guang Zhen yelled at the top of his lungs.

But as the monsters got closer, some of the soldiers started to put down their weapons and involuntarily looking back at the hole. It was obvious that they were thinking about deserting. This intention spread like the plague with more soldiers putting down their arms.

3 soldiers who stopped firing fell to Guang Zhen's rifle. He wailed coarsely, "Deserter shall die from shame! Fire, keep on firing! I will kill any deserters that I see!"

Everyone else was shocked and scared into motion. They took up their rifles and started firing again at the monsters.

1 minute later, the last monster fell. Guang Zhen sighed in relief. This last monster was closest to the base, and it was only several hundred meters away. Guang Zhen would have gone into close combat if it had gotten any closer.

There was no time for a breather, because another meat blob appeared in the sky. It vomited more monsters to the ground.

About 300 giant monsters appeared down the horizon, and everyone's hearts were chilled. Even Guang Zhen's sawblade fell helplessly to the floor.

"For humanity!"

Suddenly, someone deep within the base yelled in english. It pierced through the eerie quiet of the base. However, more people resonated in return, and the same message was repeated again and again in a multitude of languages. It was a call of both desperation and hope. Without Guang Zhen's urging, they lifted their rifles and continued firing...

At the same time, underneath the ground, the excavation crew had returned to the Hope. This was because the excavation project was reaching its end. With another contained explosion, the Hope would be able to lift off.

"Checking external anti-gravitational system... Checking complete, found no problem."

"Checking particle flux accelerators... Checking complete, found no problem."

"Checking creator's particle vibrator and isolator... Checking complete, found no problem."

"Checking the Hope's ECS system... Checking complete, found no problem."

The person lording over the command central was... Bo Li. She was designated by Yao Yuan to be the acting captain if both Yao Yuan and Guang Zhen weren't there.

Bo Li scanned through the checking report that appeared on screen and she ordered in a clear voice, "Activate the external anti-gravitational and ECS systems. Tune up the electromagnetic shield to its maximum power."

Beside her, a middle-aged man repeated, "Captain's orders. Activate the external anti-gravitational and ECS systems. Tune up the electromagnetic shield to its maximum power."

"Yes, Sir! Activating the external anti-gravitational and ECS systems and tuning up the electromagnetic shield to its maximum power!"

With one last explosion, the final thin layer of rocks that covered the top of the Hope crumbled away, revealing portion of the blue sky above.

"Lift the Hope up to 5,000 meters above sea level and activate all optical detectors."

"Captain's orders. Lift the Hope up to 5,000 meters above sea level and activate all optical detectors."

Following a series of commands, the Hope gradually disengaged itself from its position. With both particle flux accelerator and anti-gravitational units working alongside one another, in just 30 minutes, the Hope had reached its intended location. The ECS system was in action, so the Hope was hidden from the monsters' detection.

"Aim all Gaussian cannons at the ground level monsters. Operate a strafe fire. The cannons need to recharge every 3 seconds, so alternate the shots systematically. Charge our main cannon...

"Then fire the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon!"

Chapter 171: A Shot of Hope

When 300 giant monsters appeared on the battlefield, everyone in the temporary base despaired.

These monsters were 150 meters tall, taller than the base itself. Their weight was noticeable from the tremors that shook the ground whenever they moved.

5 of them almost took the temporary base down, and now there were 300 of them!

Mankind's Gaussian weapons were nullified by the monster's powerful electromagnetic shields. They were so potent that strong artillery fire was needed to break through them, but...

Mankind's defense unit only had 3,300 soldiers left. The number was simply not enough to stop the stampede of 300 giant monsters. To make things worse, the threat was not limited to the giant monsters, there were other monster types as well.

When everyone was suffocating in throes of despair, an explosion blew up not far away from the base, creating a wave of dirt and dust. The earth seemed to crack open in two, taking many by surprise.

The surprise quickly curtailed into high-spirited cheer. This meant that the defense unit had successfully completed their objective, which was to defend the base until the Hope lifted off.

Equipped with an ECS system, as long as the Hope didn't get close to the field around the mother nest, it was practically invisible to the alien monsters. Scarred by how easily the Hope had been intruded by the junkyard AI, Yao Yuan and all the authority agreed that the Hope needed upgrades and modifications.

First was its defense. A giant reactor was specifically made to charge an electromagnetic shield around the Hope. Combined with the strategic placement of alien plant alloy, the Hope could withstand another spaceship's continued fire for 5 minutes, and this included withstanding a shot from the enemy's main cannon! This technology was as strong as the junkyard battleship's.

Then was its firepower. Around 60 cannons were added to the ship's roof, and an additional 180 cannons were added to its sides. Not to be forgotten was the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon. If back on Earth, one shot from this cannon could sink an island country.

Lastly was its mobility.

Sadly, mankind's 4th revolution technology was still unable to dissect the space warp technology. However, the Hope's current particle flux engine was powerful enough to break the ozone layer without the use of anti-gravitational unit. Of course this was only a theoretical calculation put forth by the Academy. In reality, the Hope's metallic structure might not be able to withstand the pressure, especially since the Hope had such a fragile design shape.

In fact, the giant propeller used in the final plan was initially built for the Hope as an emergency acceleration device.

More upgrades were still underway. The military wanted more weapons, the admins better defense, and the public enhanced mobility. Taking in everyone's opinion, the Hope had become a high mobility, high damage, and high defense monstrosity.

The people on the temporary base cheered because this meant that they were safe... as long as they stayed out of the Hope's artillery range.

The sound of combat pulled the defense unit back to the threat at hand. Most dropped their heavy artillery for lighter weapons, leaving the giant monsters for the Hope to handle. They clashed with the foot soldiers instead.

Then, 10 seconds later...

A spot in the sky started to twist upon itself like a mirage. An energy flux started to gather on the ground, creating a sand vortex about several hundred meters tall. This was the power of the Hope's 600 cannons.

With the collective power from 600 cannons, the Academy predicted it could even blow up the moon!

Following an increased pressure in the air, the ground sunk to create a giant crater. It was as if the ground was hit by a big

meteorite. The monsters caught in the fray, 300 giant ones included, were blasted into meat pies almost immediately. They were practically smothered into the floor!

Then it was time for the Giant Gaussian Electromagnetic Cannon to shine. They were essentially a simpler version of the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon. All 18 of them aimed at a spot 40 kilometers away from the base, the spot where the alien monsters landed. Electrical ions suffused the air as the cannons charged.

This time the sand vortex was several thousand meters tall. The whole planet surface was literally covered by sand. The collective shot leveled an area that was several kilometers wide. If the previous shot was like a meteorite, this was a meteorite rain!

The defense unit on the ground stumbled and fell. Thankfully, the turrets only shook but didn't crumble. However, multiple cracks started appearing in and around the base. The 2 shots from the Hope had devastated the land's geological structure. Luckily, the Academy predicted as much during combat briefing and had calculated the angle and power of the 2 shots using the central mainframe. The 2 shots were precisely calculated to demolish the enemy but leave the base intact.

In less than a minute, the situation on the ground was overturned. The defense unit only needed to finish off a few stragglers. The Hope turned its attention to something else. The Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon was aimed upwards and not downwards. The planet probably couldn't survive a shot from the cannon. It would not only destroy parts of

the planet's geological structure, it would create a catastrophe of an unimaginable scale. This was to be mankind's future home planet, so they couldn't harm it that way. The target of the cannon was the flying monsters and the transport-use meat blobs in the sky.

The shot from the cannon broke the sound barrier, creating a zephyr as it surged through the sky. It essentially moved the planet's stratosphere as it tore the ranks of flying enemy monsters apart. The monsters within the ozone, even when they were not directly hit, were shredded by the great torrents of air. Those in space were luckier; only those directly hit perished. This meant there were still quite a number of monsters in space.

Bo Li oversaw the proceedings in central command. After some length she said, "The main cannon has been fired. If the Captain is still alive, he should be coming back soon. My order is to let the Hope lift up into space and set up a perimeter. Take down any monsters that appear in range. Initiate the final plan after a 30 second countdown..."

"Captain's orders..."

The Hope floated gently into space following Bo Li's order. The number advantage the alien had in space became a non-issue. They were all cannon fodder now.

In the meantime, the countdown continued into the single digits, 5, 4, 3...

Viewed from the Hope's central command, a red lightning bolt was flashing through space, trailing sparks and explosions in its wake. The Hope's defense cannon turned to aim at it when it flew towards the Hope. When it was within 10 kilometers of the Hope, the cannon turned elsewhere after recognizing the friendly signal that it gave off.

"Fire!"

With Bo Li's command, a giant propeller shot out of the Hope. The red combat jet assumed command over it and the propeller took on a straight trajectory towards the mother nest!

The war against the mother nest was reaching its end!

Chapter 172: Despair!

Yao Yuan had destroyed 3 reactors on the mother nest. When he went searching for the fourth, the mother nest had evolved. It had moved the last reactor deeper into its heart, and its oval shape slowly became rounded, encircling the last reactor.

Yao Yuan's weapon couldn't pierce through such a thick layer of flesh. He only managed to create craters on the surface before they clumped back together. The flesh regenerated faster than Yao Yuan could shred through them.

When Yao Yuan was figuring out a plan, he turned back to see a large crowd of monsters in the ozone around the hole where the Hope went through. He could see so far because his Seeker's power was activated. He predicted correctly that the Hope had managed to lift off.

"Yes, the Hope is the answer! The Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon could punch a hole through this thing!" Yao Yuan collected himself and turned Red Lightning back towards the Hope.

Within several minutes, Yao Yuan was in the Hope's general area. Their distance was almost similar to the distance between the Earth and the Moon. In other words, they were close enough that their ECS system could recognize and reveal each other.

"Fire!"

This was the first thing Yao Yuan heard when he crossed the threshold for communication. It was crisp and somewhat girlish; Yao Yuan recognized it as Bo Li's voice. Right after, a giant propeller shot out of the Hope.

The propeller was fitted with an internal device that allowed it to be remotely controlled by specific commands within a 100 meter radius. In other words, Yao Yuan or other troopers could control the trajectory of the propeller if they were close enough. This was the reason the plan could be executed. The technology allowed the propeller to be manually guided towards the mother nest. The set up was perfect because Yao Yuan also needed to be close to the propeller to defend it.

Yao Yuan saw the propeller dislodged from the Hope and he yelled anxiously, "The last polymerized reactor on the mother nest is still active. Use the Hope's central computer to triangulate its location and give it a shot using the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon. Its location is somewhere near the heart of the nest."

With his orders given, Yao Yuan turned to follow the propeller. Thankfully, the propeller was just accelerating, so Yao Yuan caught up to it quick.

"An emergency electromagnetic shield... It could withstand shots from weapon as strong as the Gaussian cannons for less than 5 seconds... It's like it is made of paper."

Yao Yuan grumbled when he read the details of the propeller that the Academy sent to the combat jet's computer.

However, he didn't have the time to dally. The last reactor needed to be destroyed or the plan would fail!

Under Yao Yuan's order, the Hope started to prepare to launch a shot at the mother nest. Multiple coordinates and data were entered into the central mainframe to complete the necessary calculations. However...

The mother started to disappear!

No, not disappear!

A mirage-like façade started to gloss over the mother nest's surface. This was...

The ECS system!

"This is impossible! Why does the alien have access to the ECS system, and why is it only using it now?"

Then realization dawned for Yao Yuan. He activated his Seeker's power to scan the battlefield. The broken combat jet pieces that previously littered the area had all disappeared...

The only conclusion was that the mother nest had absorbed them all. And it was evolving to create the ECS system for itself.

Everyone inside the Hope who saw this unfold had their jaws to the floor. As bigger sections of the mother nest blinked out of their eyes, the calculation on the mainframe started to go haywire. Bo Li asked instantly, "Has the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon finished charging?"

The assistant came back from the shock and replied, "Yes, Captain. It finished charging about 10 seconds ago. We're waiting for the triangulation to complete..."

"We can't afford to wait any longer. Fire it now using the last sets of coordinates we have," Bo Li ordered calmly.

"But... Yes!" The assistant said into the communicator, "Captain's order..."

Then the Hope started to rotate until its main cannon was pointing at the mother nest that was still disappearing. After a surge in electricity, the cannon fired away, shaking the Hope. Everyone held their breaths as if the shot had also taken their breath away.

The distance between the Hope and the mother nest was about 400,000 meters. In other words, the cannon shot needed about 30 seconds to reach the mother nest... This was the reason why long-distance combat wasn't preferable in space.

Once both parties had access to creator's particle and ECS system, no matter how strong your long ranged weapons were, they would be useless if they couldn't hit their target.

Furthermore, the long distance that the ammo needed to travel gave one's opponent ample time to move out of its way.

This was why Yao Yuan had focused all of the Barracks' development on high mobility combat jets. They were the real players in space combat.

Therefore, when the mother nest started using the ECS system, mankind's advantage was lost!

In the next 30 seconds, everyone in the Hope's central command waited with bated breath. Finally, the mother nest appeared out of its ECS status. Starting from the lower corner of its body, its fleshy body started to regain its shape.

"Yes, we hit it!"

Everyone cheered, but Bo Li and a few other people's expressions were unsightly. As if verifying their fear, the mother nest started disappearing again.

"We missed! The shot didn't hit the last reactor!"

Yao Yuan, who was out in the field, saw everything clearly. Despair swept through him. Now that the mother nest had complete control of its ECS system, the Hope's main cannon had lost its use. Even though the nest only had 1 reactor left, it could create more through cellular fission. This meant...

The plan had failed?!

"No! We mustn't give up. If the troopers continue firing at the mother nest, its ECS system will be disrupted enough to allow the Hope another shot, but..."

Yao Yuan glanced at the propeller beside the Red Lightning. It was still flying towards the mother nest. According to its calculated speed, it would reach its target in the next few minutes. Yao Yuan wouldn't dare to leave its side lest it got destroyed by the monsters.

However, Yao Yuan's current location was too far away from the other troopers. His Anima power wasn't strong enough to reach them from so far away. So how could he relay his plan to them?

"Nian Xi Kong!"

Yao Yuan submerged himself into the soul web. He concentrated and tried to feel out Xi Kong's presence. After he spotted the light orb that represented Xi Kong, he formed a link with her and channeled his thoughts to her...

Xi Kong was sitting on her bed, hugging her knees. Her parents were fidgeting outside in the living room. This was similar for many families on the Hope, because the civilians were asked to stay in their residences to wait for the war to pass. Suddenly, Xi Kong heard Yao Yuan's voice in her mind.

"Xi Kong, I need you!"

Chapter 173: Singing for Victory!

Other than Yao Yuan and Guang Zhen, Ying, Ebon, Liu Bai, Lee, Wa Luo, Fei Biao, Xiao Yan, Huai Shi, Zhang De, and Wang Hua were the only surviving Black Star Unit members. Other than Ying, who was a Seeker, the rest of them were all Perceptors.

With their experience in the Black Star Unit, they were undoubtedly the strongest batch of Homo Evolutis. In both rankings for Black Star Troopers and space combat jet pilots, they occupied the highest placement.

Right then, they were at the frontline, caught in a space battle with the alien monsters.

Even though their combat gains weren't as insane as Yao Yuan in Red Lightning, it was already scary enough, miles ahead of the other troopers. In other words, they were the core that kept the troopers running.

However, they were also greatly exhausted.

It had been more than 2 hours since the battle began. Even though piloting the combat jet didn't require them to keep their superhuman power activated, combat with the monsters required their extended use. That coupled with the fatigue that came with piloting the jet, they had reached their limits. 2 hours were their threshold.

"Damn it, Ying! The main cannon missed the last reactor and Ol'

Captain is not here because he has gone to intercept the propeller. What should we do now?"

After Ying blew up a bunch of monsters, another jet surfed to his side and Liu Bai's voice came over the communicator.

"Keep on fighting..." Ying said matter-of-factly. "Until the retreat order comes, we must keep on fighting!"

"I know that!" Liu Bai yelled. "But what's the strategy?"

"Then..."

Before Ying could architect an answer, a sound wafted into his brain. It was a light, caressing humming. It seemed to communicate a message to him.

"Attack the mother nest's surface to temporarily disable its ECS system?" Liu Bai echoed the thought in Ying's head.

"So... you heard it too." Ying, after some length, added firmly, "Liu Bai, contact the remaining combat jets! Order them to focus fire on the mother nest's surface!"

"Roger!" Liu Bai replied. Before he left, he asked, "By the way, do you feel that..."

"Yes, I do." Ying raised his hands to massage his temples. "I feel

my body becoming lighter, like the melody is taking my lassitude away. It's such a wonderful sound..."

The sensation was not limited to Ying and Liu Bai. The remaining 89 pilots all felt an indiscernible serenity that chased away all their fatigue. Many others also picked up the threads of message that were embedded in the melody. Staying in their 3 members per team formation, they flew towards the mother nest.

Yao Yuan, who was further away, felt the miraculous properties of the melody as well. He felt the melody reaching beyond his corporeal form. It was more than a simple transference of message, it felt like a communication between souls... Perhaps this was the true power of the Anima. She could not only communicate with anyone she wished within a certain radius across the barrier of time but also heal and reenergize the weary soul. Yao Yuan felt his previous despair melting away, and he was ready to take on the alien once more.

He looked out the window of his jet and saw something that buoyed his heart even further.

The previously organized monster army started to have its members stray from their formation. They tumbled out of their designated position like they were drunk. Some even turned on their allies, chewing and clawing at each other.

Yao Yuan saw a meat blob that was torn from within. The monsters that it was transporting turned on it from within, and after it burst open, the monsters floated about suspended in space.

"Right! The mother nest uses some kind of biological messages to make these essentially rabid monsters into an army. Xi Kong's Anima power must have overridden it somehow... We had an ultimate weapon on our side all along, we just didn't realize it! Yes, victory is possible!" Yao Yuan roared excitedly.

This excitement was replicated by the 89 pilots. As the monsters were too busy attacking each other to pose any threat to the troopers, they started to strafe fire at the mother nest's surface. It was shot by Gaussian cannons from every side.

Under such focused fire, the mother nest's ECS system started to lose its functionality. Due to the mechanism of the ECS system, it had to be attached to the surface, so under the carpet fire of 89 combat jets, parts of the ECS system underneath the mother nest's fleshy surface was destroyed. It kept rebuilding them, but it didn't take long for them to get taken down again.

The Hope started recalibrating its coordination. The invisibility of the mother nest adopted a random pattern. Sometimes its vulnerable parts would be revealed, other times not. This added to the complication of the calibration. After 30 seconds, the calculation was completed after mixing and matching all of the different parts that were revealed at varying times. Now they only needed to take into account its location and movement speed.

Everything was rapidly processed by the central mainframe.

"We have 5 more seconds, 4, 3, 2, 1..."

The assistant mouthed out the countdown that appeared on screen. After it drew to 0, multiple windows of data appeared. Bo Li ordered immediately, "Send all the data over to the main cannon. Fire immediately after the recharging's completed!"

"Yes. Captain's orders..."

Several seconds later, the Hope was assaulted by another tremor. Another shot was launched from the Supermagnetic Planet Annihilating Rail-Cannon.

The shot carried humanity's prayers. Everyone stared at the screen silently as the shot they focused on arced through space...

There was no sound in space, but everyone could clearly see an explosion as the cannon shot came into contact with the mother nest. It writhed around a small ball of fire that emerged at its center as if it was wincing from the heat and pain.

With the loss of its last reactor, the entire mother nest reappeared in space because the power going to the ECS system was lost. The mother nest was defenseless... at least until it reconstructed a new reactor.

Not only that, the surveillance in the Hope showed the density of creator's particle in space decreasing. Evidently, the mother nest was too injured to be able to manipulate the string.

"Increase the creator's particle's functionality to its maximum. Clear away the creator's particles within this planet system," Bo Li ordered.

"Captain's orders..."

Several minutes later, as the melody started to slow down, about 70 percent of the creator's particles had been neutralized. There were still communication issues, but the Hope's surveillance devices had come back online. The surveillance range broke past the 10 kilometers limitation.

"There is a high energy reaction within the mother nest. It is creating a new reactor. Size medium, predicted completion time is 37 minutes..."

"The giant propeller will reach its target in less than 16 seconds... 13, 12, 11... It has made contact. Activating super growth field to push the propeller deeper into the enemy..."

"Unusual development found within the mother nest. Disappearance of high energy reaction, I suspect it has abolished the plan to create a reactor. Concentration of cells around the propeller increasing... The cells disappeared... The mother nest is collapsing, heading towards dissolution..."

"Dissolution stopped. Emergence of a new type of cell, and it's increasing in numbers..."

When the propeller shot into the mother nest, the nest became animated. Its fleshy surface started gyrating in waves. It was reacting to the appearance of an alien object in its body. The constant motion all over its surface lent it a look of desperation...

Or excitement.

Following the disappearance of the melody, the monsters should have returned to their disciplined selves; however, they were weirdly agitated. They flew towards the mother nest to merge their bodies into it. In a matter of minutes, the space was cleared of any living monsters.

"The plan is working successfully. Increase the propeller's propulsion to its maximum. The target is... the sun!"

Chapter 174: Soul Singer

To be accurate, the giant propeller was not pushing the mother nest towards the sun in a straight line.

First, the front of the propeller was equipped with a super growth field generator that reacted with the mother nest at the cellular level. It hardened the cell wall so to speak so that the propeller would not simply shoot through the nest. The propeller, although big in size, was as small as a needle when compared to the overall size of the mother nest. It would pierce through the nest if not for this technology.

Due to its mass, the propeller was unable to push the mother nest in a straight line towards the sun. The plan was to utilize Moon 2's gravitational force to add to the acceleration. The aim was to circle around Moon 2 to harvest centrifugal force that could add to the propulsion.

The whole process was slated to last for 2 hours and 40 minutes. According to the central mainframe, the first 2 hours would be the most important. After the 2 hours, the acceleration would have reached an irreversible acceleration.

Prior to that, the propeller couldn't suffer any hostile attack and must be manually guided. Yao Yuan was tasked with handling these 2 important details. He was successful, so the propeller managed to lodge itself into the mother nest, initiating the tug-of-war between the mother nest and the alien plant. This caused the creator's particles to decrease in density, because the mother nest was too focused dealing with the alien plant. When the mother

nest reached Moon 2's orbital range, the creator's particles had completely been removed and communications came back online.

"...This is 001 combat jet, I am Yao Yuan. Please give me a combat report."

"002 combat jet suffers from an abrasion to the left wing, energy level at 21 percent..."

"003 combat jet suffers no damage, energy level at 26 percent..."

"... 127 combat jet suffers damage to the particle flux accelerator, lowering the mobility by 11 percent. Energy level at 30 percent..."

After the last trooper gave his report, Yao Yuan calculated there were still 90 troopers still alive. In other words, about 20 Homo Evolutis had died.

"The undamaged combat jets stay to watch over the proceedings, the rest returns to the Hope... Yao Yuan to the Hope, Yao Yuan to the Hope, request to speak with the acting captain."

"This is the Hope's central command. Nice to hear from you, Captain. Connecting you to the acting captain now..."

"Bo Li? I need a report on the mother nest."

Bo Li read the crowded data that appeared on screen and replied,

"The mother nest's inner layer is undergoing drastic changes. The scanners show that its cellular structure is rapidly changing, not unlike how the gene vibrator operates. According to our heat scanner, one third of the mother nest has been consumed by the alien plant but the mother nest is stabilizing and fighting back..."

"How long do we have?" Yao Yuan asked after some thought.

Bo Li glanced at the computer simulation and answered, "1 hour and 20 minutes until the alien plant starts to get consumed in return, then there will be about 15 minutes of downtime for evolution to occur."

"1 hour and 35 minutes in total? That's much shorter than the predicted 2 hours," Yao Yuan grouched.

Suddenly, a voice entered his communicator. It was Xiao Niao's. "Yao Yuan, the voice just now came from Nian Xi Kong, right?"

Yao Yuan answered offhandedly because he was preoccupied with figuring out a solution. "Hmm, I asked her to help me pass on my message to attack the mother nest to the rest of you. I wasn't expecting her power to be so strong that it could affect the mons... Wait, Xiao Niao, do you mean...?"

"Yes, that is exactly what I mean. If the alien plant couldn't hold the mother nest that long, we can ask Xi Kong for help. If she can keep the mother nest occupied for about 20 minutes, the plan will work!" Xiao Niao's voice answered.

A rejuvenated Yao Yuan yelled into the communicator, "Hope, this is Yao Yuan. Get Nian Xi Kong to central command and give her an electromagnetic transmitter. Ask her to try singing at the mother nest!"

Following Yao Yuan's orders, the diffident Xi Kong was brought to command central. She fidgeted nervously under the crowd's gaze as Yao Yuan explained to her the mission.

"I..." Xi Kong glanced at her feet, afraid to lift her head. After a long while, she took a deep breath and said, "Yao, Yao Yuan, do you really need me to do this?"

"Yes, Xi Kong, I need you! I need you to use your voice to disturb the mother nest's cellular actions, so sing at the top of your lungs and fill the empty cosmos with your voice!"

"Okay," Xi Kong replied in a soft voice before closing her eyes to focus.

Bo Li, who was sitting in the captain's seat beside Xi Kong, kept her face straight, but a closer inspection would reveal her subtly twitching eyebrows.

After all the equipment was set up, Xi Kong's voice was transmitted through space in the form of electromagnetic waves. However, more than that, her voice also reached across people's hearts in a more ethereal connection, one that science couldn't explain.

"She really does have an impressive voice. I get relaxed every time I hear it."

A male technician in command central offered as he involuntarily closed his eyes to submerge himself in the enjoyment of Xi Kong's song. The female technician beside him nodded in agreement, but she nudged him out of his reverie, adding, "Look, the cellular distribution in the mother nest is changing!"

Following Xi Kong's singing, the cells inside the mother nest started to show a "rogue" condition. They started to slow down until they reached inactivity. This gave the alien plant the break it needed to spread out across the mother nest. Slowly but surely, more and more of the mother nest was consumed by the alien plant!

The troopers who were still fighting cheered in relief when they saw this development. Even Yao Yuan sighed in relief.

"...Please don't revive again. We've used everything we got, just become plant food already!" Yao Yuan mumbled to himself while looking at the gyrating mother nest before him.

As time passed, the troopers who returned to fix their jets came back to surround the mother nest, and Yao Yuan returned to the Hope in the Red Lightning to personally give support to Xi Kong... The girl's voice had gotten hoarse from singing nonstop for about an hour. She was reaching her limit.

The room was as still as the inside of a coffin as Xi Kong finished

another song. The initial excitement was replaced by a heavy solemnity. Many civilians crowded the corridor outside of central command after they heard what was happening. Many hugged each other closely and stared at the singing girl in silence. Some of the younger girls in the crowd even started to cry.

"That's enough!"

Yao Yuan strode to Xi Kong's side and took the trembling girl in his arms, adding, "You've done more than enough, please leave the rest to us."

Xi Kong smiled up at him. There was a faint, sickly blush on her face. She said weakly, "I hope I've been of use to you..."

"Of course, you've done more than what I could have possibly asked for, so please, rest now," Yao Yuan replied kindly. Then he felt pressure on his arms because Xi Kong had collapsed.

"Carry her to the care unit, and keep a close eye on her." Yao Yuan passed Xi Kong to the crew of doctors who were already waiting. After they had left, Yao Yuan turned to Bo Li. "Bo Li, I'll leave the Hope to you. Keep me updated on the mother nest's condition. We've done everything we could. The rest..."

"We shall leave to fate."

Yao Yuan left for the hangar after that. He got on the Red Lightning to finish the rest of his mission.

In his hurry, he failed to notice the disappointment that flitted across Bo Li's eyes and hatred that flitted across Ji Jie's.

Xi Kong, in her unconsciousness, returned to the empty space she occupied whenever she sang. She was surrounded by light orbs and dots. She instantly spotted the biggest orb that represented Yao Yuan, but to her consternation, she found a dark orb behind it. It was bigger than the size of the normal orbs, and instead of emanating light, it seemed to be sucking the light from its surroundings. It was cold, as cold as the touch of death...

Chapter 175: The Truth...

Yao Yuan left the Hope in the Red Lightning. In a matter of minutes, he joined the rest of the troopers who were guarding the mother nest that was heading towards the sun.

With a one-hour-long disturbance, the alien plant had consumed 1/3 of the mother nest... It was true, even with the disruption from Xi Kong's song, the mother nest hadn't stopped evolving. At the height of Xi Kong's song, half of the mother nest had been consumed by alien plant, but it had started to fight back.

The moment the song stopped, the mother nest was jolted into action. It showed a drastic increase in cellular activity. The alien cells were consuming the alien plants at record speed.

Simultaneously, a great amount of dead cells and metallic alloys, water vapor, and air were steadily removed from the mother nest. It had shrunk by 30 percent, and it was still shrinking.

Everyone watched all this unfold with nervous hearts. The time finally crossed the 2 hour threshold, so the mother nest was hurtling towards the sun with exceptional speed. The propulsion from the propeller kept increasing; its speed was now 270 kilometers per second. The acceleration was still increasing, but it wasn't as strong as it was in Moon 2's orbital range.

Thus far, the mother nest had flown past the first 2,000,000 kilometers. That was only a small part of the total distance, which was 140,000,000 kilometers. Then again, the aim of the operation

wasn't to push the mother nest directly into the sun but to let the mother nest reach an irreversible acceleration. It would be hard for an organism this big to decelerate after constant acceleration. Even when it does stop, it will be too near to the sun not to be affected by its gravitational pull. It would also have to contend with the Hope's sniping of its reemerging reactors. That was the true purpose of Celestial Wolf Operation.

"Let's stop... We shall return to the Hope," Yao Yuan ordered as the mother nest continued to drift on its trajectory.

All that was left to do was wait.

The biggest difference between the particle flux propeller and traditional combustion engine was their longevity. The traditional combustion engine was limited by its fuel, but the energy source for the particle flux propeller was at the 4th industrial revolution level. Its battery was the size of a match box, but it could provide the energy output of a small electricity plant.

This energy source was none other than a mini polymerized reactor. In other words, the acceleration could be trusted to keep constant. Even though the acceleration speed was expected to decrease as time went on, the mother nest was slated to reach 300 kilometers per second in the next 3 hours and 320 kilometers in the next 10 hours. That would also be when the propeller would run out of fuel...

So Yao Yuan was correct, all they could do then was wait.

After Yao Yuan and the troopers returned to the Hope, they went to take a well-deserved rest. The Hope's surveillance kept on running...

"2 hours and 22 minutes in, all traces of alien plant has disappeared like the simulation said it would. The mother nest is beginning its evolution. The time it'll take is unknown..."

"3 hours and 47 minutes in, a mass cellular collapse within the mother nest. It's shedding off extra weight, according to our calculation, its current mass is about $\frac{1}{30}$ its original mass. This increases the propeller's acceleration. It is now at 600 kilometers per second and still increasing..."

"4 hours and 56 minutes in, the cellular collapse has ceased. It's current mass is $\frac{1}{90}$ of its original mass. Current speed is at 1,400 kilometers per second..."

"5 hours and 4 minutes in, the propeller is starting to get digested. The mother nest is showing a green coloration. We suspect that it is mass producing new supercells..."

"5 hours and 32 minutes in, the evolution into supercells has been completed..."

When Yao Yuan woke up, it was already 6 hours since the initiation of Celestial Wolf Operation. He quickly took a quick shower before resuming his duties in central command.

"...Currently all the cells in mother cell are supercells, it's going at 1,500 kilometers per second, and it is about 12,000,000 kilometers away from the sun. It'll be another 9 hours before it reaches irreversible speed," Bo Li mumbled beside Yao Yuan.

Yao Yuan looked at the mother nest that appeared on screen... It was about 1/90 of its original size. With a green color coat, it looked less like exposed flesh but one with green-colored skin.

"How's its internal energy reaction?" Yao Yuan asked.

"This part is weird because there is no energy reaction. We can't pick up any traces of it..."

"...then we shall wait to see what it does next."

This wait lasted for 2 hours. The mother nest seemed to have hibernated.

Suddenly, when everyone thought things were going to be fine, a cyst grew on the back end of the nest. It unfolded to reveal a giant particle flux, resisting the nest's acceleration.

"The target is slowing down drastically! Current speed 1567, 65, 64 kilometers... per second, the number keeps on dropping!"

Yao Yuan yelled, "Don't get flustered. Ready the main cannon, aim at the cyst!"

"Yes. Captain's orders..."

Like how it was planned, the Hope started utilizing its main cannon to snipe at the mother nest. Due to the distance between them though, even with the cannon shot's speed, it would take several hours to fully monitor its impact. Thankfully, with the aid of the central mainframe, in the next 14 hours, 3 shots were fired. By then, the acceleration of the mother nest was at 600 kilometers per second...

However, one thing of note was that after the evolution, the mother nest had a harder time responding to the cannon shots. Perhaps it was still unfamiliar with the particle flux's operation.

That gave Yao Yuan the impression that this supercell might not be as strong as they feared.

However, a new development came over from the biology lab...

The supercells that were bred in the petri dish had undergone another evolution. They had evolved to adopt the alien plant's shape. The new cells had a trademark as well!

Other than that, this new cell would begin expanding. If not for the laser that kept the cells under containment, the Hope would have been eaten from within!

"...What you're saying is that this new cell violated the law of

mass conservation and grew without consuming anything?" Yao Yuan asked in surprise.

Ivan shook his head/ "That's not exactly correct. To be precise, it consumed the ions in the air to grow. It no longer needed to rely on solid substances; it could transmute water and energy from atoms found in the air. The cell can keep on growing if it's exposed to air."

Yao Yuan's face sunk because this was the perfect evolution for the mother nest. As it neared the sun, the solar wind would provide it with enough materials to grow into an invincible monster!

"Why did it start evolving only now? I thought the previous supercell was already its final form," Yao Yuan asked.

Bo Li, who stood beside him, answered, "Probably... it was still decoding the password then."

"Decoding the password?"

"Yes, the alien plant's genetic code so to speak. This plant is a creation from a high level civilization, meaning its code is most likely hard to decipher, so it took the alien cell this long to unlock it."

"I understand."

Yao Yuan stared solemnly at the mother nest on the screen. He finally understood why the mother nest was having delayed reactions to the cannon shots. It was busy decoding the alien plants to fully absorb the plant's technology as its own and transform into the scary cells found in the biology lab!

Chapter 176: Super Organism !

"However, it is as Zhang Heng said: the alien has the most basic of instinct and intelligence. The desire to acquire technology outweighs everything else. It doesn't even care that it's hurtling towards the sun... Such crazy need."

At about 19 hours and 30 minutes, the mother nest started changing its forum. Under the Hope's careful surveillance, it slowly changed to adopt the trademarked genetic code. Before its death, it put on the most grotesque freak show mankind had ever seen...

In about 10 seconds, the mother nest flattened itself to a skin-like organism. Its thickness was about 10 centimeters, and it looked ready to completely envelop a planet.

The piece of skin graft unfurled before mankind's eyes with surprising speed. Even at the Hope's distance, one could see it expanding. It grew larger and larger, expanding at an exponential rate.

Numerous bulbous growths emerged on the side that faced the sun. They were mini particle flux accelerators. Their purpose was obviously to slow the acceleration down.

However...

It was already too close to the sun. The most generous estimation put it at about 30,000 kilometers away from the sun. It was already

within the sun's gravitational range. The sun's high temperature and pressure were pulling it towards its death!

"Its speed continues to drop, 400 kilometers per second...

"300 kilometers per second...

"200 kilometers per second...

"It's burning..."

The skin organism slowly caught on fire like a piece of paper. However, it kept growing and decreasing in speed. Alas, it was too late. It fell into the sun, into a place where the Hope's surveillance couldn't keep up anymore, and the screen went completely white...

At the same time, in a cordoned off internet café sat Xiao Niao. He gained entry by using his trooper's privilege. He chose his usual table and switched on the game, Star Craft 3. He stared at the familiar main menu until he eventually fell asleep. 6 hours had passed when he woke up next.

He was feeling groggy until the ID ZERO joined his server. He sat up straight in his seat, feeling suddenly refreshed.

"Noob, you're here?" Xiao Niao typed hurriedly.

"I'm not a noob! I've proven you wrong, haven't I? I've presented

to you the actual Zerg in space! Qi Xiao Niao!"

"Yes, that is definitely a Zerg. but I'm more interested in knowing what are you, ZERO."

ZERO kept up a long silence. When Xiao Niao thought he had gone offline, the reply came.

"I am ZERO, the beginning as you humanfolk put it..."

"As we humanfolk? Does this mean you're not one of us? Then who, or what, are you? The Hope itself, or an alien? God or demon?"

ZERO retreated into silence once more. Xiao Niao waited patiently and eventually his patience paid off. ZERO replied, "I was born on Earth, but differently... from mankind. I have no honest answer as to what I am, but I'm sure I'm not an a... Furthermore, there is no God in space, but there is indeed a demon race, the kind described in your bible."

Xiao Niao looked curiously at the answers. He couldn't understand it. He replied, "You said you were born on Earth but not a human..."

Suddenly, it hit Xiao Niao and he typed excitedly, "I know, are you from Atlantis? This means you're a merman or a mermaid?"

ZERO's reply came instantly this time. "No, I'm not from

Atlantis, not a merfolk, I'm... a pure spiritual life force if I have to describe it, something akin to your humankind's understanding of a plasmatic life form..."

"What the hell is a plasmatic life form..." Xiao Niao grouched. He was a thinker, but he was no scientist, so the scientific term proved to be a tumble for him.

"But speaking of pure spiritual life force, this means you're an angel? So you were telling the truth when you said you're a girl. Wait a minute... angels can be men or even transgendered. I've seen plenty of angelic men in sailor outfits before in anime. Are you one of those?"

"... Do you hate men?" ZERO asked suddenly.

"Hate is too harsh a word. But my typical impression for an angel is a female, so discovering that she is actually he would come as a bit of a disappointment," Xiao Niao replied after some thought.

"Then you can just treat me as a female, but in any case, I'm not an angel... I'm leaving, seems like the Zerg crisis is over. Be thankful that I've kept a tab on it, greatly decreasing its cellular decoding capability to buy you extra time... So don't call me a noob again," ZERO typed.

Xiao Niao responded immediately, "So how could I find you next? Err... for multiplayer games like Star Craft 3, Civilization 7. The more the merrier, right? Plus, as you've said, the Zerg crisis is over, I foresee an extended relaxation time for games..."

"...I will find you when I need to and... The peace won't last for long because the program is still running, there will never be peace unless the civilization breaks through the level 9 limit or finds the 'key'..."

And ZERO logged off.

Xiao Niao had gotten a lot of useful information. He had said many insignificant things, but the final purpose was to drag as much information out of ZERO as he could. A majority of the things ZERO revealed were within his expectations. Now he needed to find a secluded place, one where the possibility of eavesdropping and spying was nilch, to discuss it over with Yao Yuan, to request his aid to set a trap...

The only thing that worried him from the conversation was ZERO's parting sentence. What did he mean by peace wouldn't last long? What program was still running? What is the level 9 limitation? And what is the "key?"

These were beyond his comprehension.

As he walked out of the internet café, he heard cheers resounding through the crowd. People were running up and down the corridors in celebratory fashion. They danced, they laughed and they cheered. The reason for their celebration was...

Mankind had won! Victory was theirs!

They had a planet with a blue sky, blue sea, and lush greenery waiting for them to discover...

And to architect into mankind's new home planet!

Chapter 177: Virus

This was hours before the mother nest evolved to a super organism...

There was another battle happening inside the Hope.

"This won't do, the virus has spread to the internal organs. More than 5 troopers are suffering from internal bleeding, breathing difficulties, and palpitations. If this continues..."

A researcher yelled hurriedly as he watched the data on the screen.

Behind him were more than 100 scientists and researchers, including Whisperers, Ivan, and Saburo. They were the Hope's brightest minds on the subject of pathology and biology. Their greatest hurdle right now was the new home planet and its viruses and bacteria.

As previously mentioned, the planet's virus and bacteria had a different growth history from the ones found on Earth. For example, even though the planet's virus and bacteria were carbon-based, their genetic code was wildly different from the ones on Earth. This meant that mankind's immune system offered zero protection against them.

In fact, they found out that a single breath of the planet's air would cause irrevocable damage to Earth's survivors. The infection was so strong that the infected would die in a matter of

days or even hours! This was unlike sci-fi movies where the first thing humans did after locating a new planet was take off their space helmets and breathe in the open air. That would be essentially committing suicide.

Ivan frowned deeply. He exchanged a meaningful look with Saburo before saying, "Apply flash freeze to the troopers' bodies and prepare necessary body fluid shots."

The researcher was stunned. Before he could protest, a senior scientist beside him said, "Professor Ivan, are you sure about this? There are still many flaws with the flash freezing mechanism. If we don't unfreeze them in the next 3 days, the cold will cause irreparable damage to the human bodies..."

Saburo came to Ivan's support. "It's still better than letting them die now, right? We already have 4 deaths on our hands. Among the living, Zhang Heng is undergoing heart shock and heart arrest. This is the only way available to keep them alive until we find the vaccine."

The senior scientist sighed because he knew Saburo was right. A few minutes later, all of the quarantined troopers were given body fluid shots to prepare their bodies for flash freezing. This was to prevent their skin from being frostbitten during the procedure. Then the super growth fields were activated, and all of the troopers' bodies were sent into stasis. Unlike the flash freezing portrayed in sci-fi, there were no blocks of ice; the troopers merely looked like they had fallen asleep.

Everyone stood outside the lab to watch over the procedure until

a fight broke out between Ivan and Saburo.

"Professor Saburo, I staunchly refuse to let you conduct any experiments with the alien cells. For one, they are held by the military. Furthermore, you have seen for yourself how dangerous these cells can be from our force's battles with them. If the experiments went wrong and they infected the human body, to be honest... I'd rather the troopers die!" Ivan said strongly.

Saburo, who was normally polite in his demeanor, retorted angrily, "But Professor Ivan, can you think of any other way to save these people? Every single one of them has contracted more than 100 fatal viral and bacterial strands. Each of the strands is responsible for a different cellular damage, and thus every single one of them requires a specific vaccine. Could we feasibly create more than 100 vaccines in 3 days? Furthermore, because of the flash freezing, their bodies' immune system has completely shut down! This is our only choice!"

Ivan hesitated before shaking his head firmly. "No, this might be our only choice, but I still can't allow it. Have you thought of the consequences? The cells might save their lives, but they might take control over their bodies. I believe the troopers would rather die than be mind-controlled by the alien!"

Saburo replied quickly, "That won't happen because I won't directly inject the cells into their bodies. I still have basic knowledge of biology. I will begin by allowing the alien cells contact to the virus and bacteria in petri dishes. Do you still remember these alien cells' unique properties? They have no set genetic structural code. In other words, whenever it comes into a

contact with a new virus or bacteria, as long as they are not ones that would kill them instantly, the cells can change their genetic code to eventually create immunity against these new virus and bacteria.

Then, by observing the interaction between the planet's virus and bacteria with the alien cells, we can replicate or retrieve the immunogens and lysozymes from the alien cells and..."

Ivan interrupted him. "This sounds good, but you are using mankind's scientific knowledge to understand the alien cell. I too have thought of this possibility. To use the alien cells to breed the necessary stem cells to inject into the human bodies rather than injecting the alien cells directly. If the human body accepts the stem cells, immunity will be gained. However... who can be certain a spliced cell from the alien cell doesn't contain its harmful DNA? Maybe its RNA is more than enough to create complete alien cells inside the human body. Then the victims would be eaten alive from within!

"This is space we're in! None of us know how the alien cell could evolve. What if I'm right and they can regenerate with just a spliced cell? Maybe the effect is latent in the beginning, but after 10 days, 1 year, or even 1 decade later? Could the cells not suddenly wake up and become active again? Like what had happened to the aquatic civilization, the cells can reproduce and spread by infecting its host's body. The whole civilization was wiped out in mere months; do you wish the same to happen to us, mankind?"

The hidden accusation in Ivan's words was clear. If he had brought this before Yao Yuan, Saburo would definitely be labeled a

public threat.

Saburo's face was as red as a tomato. He took several calming breaths before adding, "Regardless, I will continue with this experiment! Professor Ivan, if you have any more objections to it, you are welcome to report to the Captain... I'm doing this not for glory or for fame!" Saburo felt warmed by the memory that swamped his mind, the smile of his love he once lost. It gave him the courage to say out loud, "This is to save human lives! Death is the great equalizer, but only for the dead; the pain lies forever more with the living. To prevent others from suffering the same fate I did, I will carry on with this experiment unless you have me detained!

"Professor Ivan, you do not understand the gravity of this experiment? It not only affects the currently infected troopers but our future as well. Like you said, we are in space, and mankind is nothing but a brief candle buffeted by the cosmos' vile winds. Any contact with future planets or organisms could lead us back to this situation, and the scale might be even bigger. This time we have about 20 deaths, but what about next time? Let another 20 people die for the safety of the majority simply because we have no ways to save them? How is that different from the officials that abandoned Earth the moment tragedy struck?

"I refuse to succumb to this weakness! These people can and must be saved; human life is most precious. The alien cells provide us with the best raw material to cultivate the ultimate vaccine. Yes, it is risky, but there is risk behind every breakthrough. Furthermore, isn't taking risks what we scientists are here for?"

Saburo bowed deeply at Ivan, adding, "I guess this is where we part ways, Professor Ivan. I've learned a lot in our times working together, but this... is my own battle now! Unless you kill or incapacitate me, there is no way I'm stopping this experiment. If the alien cell does end up infecting me, I'll activate the lab's neutralizing sequence..."

Saburo straightened himself and walked out of the room. His assistants that made to follow were deterred by the stern glare in his eyes. He strode alone to his lab, his departure solitary yet unusually glaring...

Chapter 178: During the Experiment

Mankind's medical history was thousands of years long. Discounting the prehistoric period, even modern medicine had had a long history of about 200 years. However, we were still hamstrung when it came to vaccines against viruses, bacteria, and microbes as well as risky operations like heart transplants.

When mankind's technology reached the 4th revolution, many medical technologies also evolved. For example, there was a type of nanobot that could enter the human body to repair damaged organs or dissect tumors without the need for surgery. Other than that, the genetic mesomeric resonator could be used to elongate all carbonate life forms', mankind included, lifespan. The efficacy of surgery could also be increased by using technologies the like super growth field to stabilize the cellular activities of human organs during operation to increase the operation's success rate. However, the side effect of the super growth field was still heavy on animals, so its uses were mostly limited to plants. It would probably require the 5th or 6th industrial revolution for the technology to be perfected.

It was true that the 4th revolution had introduced a giant increase to mankind's medical progress, but there was also the appearance of many new diseases. Or rather, there was an increase in the number of viruses, bacteria, and microbes mankind's medical technology couldn't handle in space.

Saburo was alone in the locked laboratory. Of course, Yao Yuan, who had the master key, could still enter it, so this wasn't a step to ward off Yao Yuan but to steel his own determination.

"Hanako, Shiro... I will not let what happened to you repeat itself!"

At the same time, Ivan sat silently in the biology lab. Researchers in the room looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to come to a decision.

After some time, Ivan announced suddenly, "Report this to the Captain, then..."

The group of scientists sighed both in relief and in worry. This meant Saburo's experiment would be forcefully halted, but it would help ensure the Hope's safety.

"...then transfer all the data we have on the alien cells, as well as this planet's microbes, viruses, and bacteria to Professor Saburo. That is the least we can do for him."

Relief changed into shock. The researchers were confused. Did Ivan want to stop or help Saburo? His orders served 2 drastically different purposes.

Regardless of his intentions, as the leader of the biology committee, Ivan's orders were quickly carried out. However, there were some issues during the transference of information. Since Yao Yuan and other authorities had their focus fully trained on the mother nest that was hurtling towards the sun, they wrongly assumed the update meant Saburo was still working on discovering the alien cell's weakness, so they didn't pay it much attention.

Just like that, Saburo attained all the data from the biology lab. He then received splices of untainted alien cells from the damaged combat jets that returned from war. Since the combat jets hadn't entered the planet's atmosphere, the alien cells attached to them hadn't had contact with the planet's microbes, viruses, and bacteria. They were, so to speak, pure.

In the next few hours, Saburo submerged completely into his experiments. Time flew by as he worked on data analysis, observations, and experiments. His whisperer power was activated from time to time, allowing him big and small breakthroughs...

Several hours later, the mother nest, which had evolved to a super organism, was confirmed to be dead. The Hope breathed a collective sigh of relief. However, no one knew that for one member of the Hope, the battle was still going on...

When the correct news reached Yao Yuan, it was already 3 hours after the destruction of the mother nest. It was so delayed because there were simply too many things waiting to be done. The steps that needed to be done to ensure that the death of the mother nest was final took up about an hour of his time. The rest was spent doing something incredibly important... that was to clear all the remnants of the alien cells within this solar system!

Emergency modifications were done on the remaining 80 space jets so that their emissions could release high heat using the interaction between liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen. Rough estimations put the required time to finish clearing the alien carcasses at 3 months. The monster carcasses littered the solar

system, so they had to prioritize the ones that were closest to New Earth.

Similarly, the clearing had to be done on New Earth. This operation would require lesser time, 1 and a half months to be precise. This was because it was easier to clean the carcasses on Earth due to the presence of natural oxygen. Unlike the space combat jets, the exterminators on New Earth had no need for constant refuels. Furthermore, they could rely on technology, like Fuel Air Explosives, to clear a large space within a short period of time.

Within the 3 hours, Yao Yuan dropped a newly created Fuel Air Explosive on the spot where the alien monsters landed. After that, a unit with flamethrowers was dispatched to make sure all traces of alien were burned away.

He finally had some time to take a breather when Guang Zhen led the flamethrower unit of about 2,000 people from the Hope. However, before he could even grab a quick bite, another piece of breaking news fell into his lap.

"What? You mean Professor Saburo has locked himself up into a laboratory to conduct experiments on the alien cells?" Yao Yuan asked in shock.

Ivan, who came to update him on the infected, nodded firmly. "That's right, Captain. We sent this information to you a few hours before the death of the mother nest was confirmed."

"Are you sure?" Yao Yuan asked, still in shock. "How could it have been reported already? I would have stopped him if I knew. The alien cell can easily mutate to become a supercell capable of digesting everything. How could he be allowed to conduct such a dangerous experiment?! If he is infected, no one will be around to help him because he's doing this on his own! Stop him immediately! Never mind, I'll go and stop him myself!" Yao Yuan leaped out of his seat, hailed an electromobile, and sped to the Academy.

With an agile backflip that was inconspicuous with his scientist identity, Ivan leaped into the seat beside Yao Yuan. He smiled slyly in response to the surprised gaze that Yao Yuan threw him, adding, "Captain, you can't pin the blame on us. We did inform you of this hours ago; you must have missed it somehow. Because no reply came from you, we assumed you were in support of Saburo's action."

Yao Yuan racked his mind and indistinctly remembered someone did come over from the biology lab with an update. The person said that Saburo wanted to commission pre-evolved alien cells for his experiment. Since Saburo was a firm follower of scientific protocol, Yao Yuan didn't dwell on it. Furthermore, he thought a whole lab would be watching over Saburo's experiment. Help would be readily available if anything went wrong.

Lastly, all his focus then was occupied by the mother nest. Now that the mother nest was a problem of the past, Yao Yuan realized he had glossed over an important piece of news due to his haste and Ivan's careful wordplay.

However, he found himself unable to punish Ivan or even Saburo. Professor Saburo's action was ultimately for the goodness of mankind, and his willingness to take on this dangerous experiment alone was admirable.

"Regardless... Let's get to the lab first and pray that nothing serious has gone wrong..." Yao Yuan sighed.

Inside the lab, Saburo held a test tube with his shaking hands. After a few hours of using his Whisperer power, his face was flushed a sickly red. He stared at the thing inside the test tube with pride. That was the purpose of his experiment... It turned out better than how he expected it be.

The ultimate vaccine's first prototype!

Chapter 179: The Past

Ivan and Yao Yuan arrived at Saburo's lab with the escort of a military unit and many researchers. With Yao Yuan's master key, they gained access into Saburo's locked lab.

When they entered the lab, they saw Saburo lying on the floor, his hands clutching a sealed test tube.

Many were petrified witnessing this; some of the young interns even went so far as to cover their noses with their hands. After all, they knew of the alien cell's hazards. Being infected was a fate worse than death. They had seen such horrible events described in sci-fi, and they had no intention of allowing it to happen to themselves.

On the contrary, Ivan, Yao Yuan, and most of the senior researchers merely frowned. Yao Yuan, as a Diviner, didn't pick up any danger warnings, so naturally the alien cells hadn't leaked.

On the other hand, the senior researchers were familiar with scientific protocol. The only thing out of the ordinary was a fainted Saburo; the rest of the lab was in perfect condition. They had faith in Saburo that he wouldn't be careless enough to violate simple protocol.

"...Get Professor Saburo to the hospital. This is exhaustion from overexerting his superhuman powers. Feed him some nutrients packs," Yao Yuan ordered the group of doctors and nurses that tagged along after he squatted down beside Saburo to inspect his

situation.

Only then did the interns know that there was no danger in the room. After all, if there was any, Yao Yuan as a Diviner would be the first to warn them. They put down their hands awkwardly and moved to help the nurses lift Saburo onto the electromobile.

By then, Yao Yuan had already taken the test tube from Saburo's hands. He lifted it to his eyes and tried to train his Diviner power at it. He only felt a tiny tingle of danger. Several seconds later, he passed it over to Ivan, adding, "Now it's the Academy's time to shine. Find out what is inside this test tube. Depending on his physical situation, it will take a day to a week for Saburo to regain consciousness, but our men who were flash frozen only have 3 days left. It's my order that... the Academy continues Professor Saburo's experiment, first by finding out what is inside test tube!"

Ivan accepted the test tube, and after some thought, accosted Yao Yuan with a serious expression. "I will take over the experiment, but there is something that I wish to make clear with the Captain."

Yao Yuan nodded his head, signaling for Ivan to continue.

Ivan added, "No matter what is inside this test tube, if it has anything to do with the alien cell, I will not conduct any live human experiments. If you force me to do it, I'll demolish this test tube and all my research notes."

Yao Yuan stared into Ivan's eyes and he saw a firm determination burning within. He nodded and said, "Alright, you have my word."

There will be no such orders... By the way, Ivan..."

Ivan sighed in relief before asking, "Yes, Captain?"

"I remember... your resume said that before you came on to the Hope, you worked as a biologist for a small Middle Eastern country and hosted the country's research on bio-weapons, am I correct?" Yao Yuan asked.

Ivan was shocked as he balled his fists and lowered his head, adding ruefully, "Yes, that's correct. I was tasked with such a project, and it compelled me to conduct..."

Stopping Ivan mid-sentence, Yao Yuan patted Ivan on his shoulder to express his understanding. He then led the medical unit out of the lab. It wasn't until his shadow disappeared around the corner that a voice appeared in Ivan's head.

"Follow your conscience. To save or to kill, poison or medicine... the difference lies in the user's intention. Ivan, as one of the 3 Whisperers, I will leave the rest in your hands. The safety of everyone on the Hope, the lives of the 20 plus heroes and the necessity of human experiments... I'm sure you'll make the right decision."

Ivan was visibly shaken. His hands that held the test tube grew tighter. Sometime later, he yelled, "Start analyzing Professor Saburo's data and use it to understand what is inside this test tube... Let's start moving, people."

...That year.

Saburo was a new medical student, training to be a good physician. Other than the prestige of being a doctor, Saburo was more interested in the profession's lucrative salary and benefits. He needed the money to improve his quality of life so that he could provide a good life for his beloved Hanako.

Hanako, full name Kosaka Hanaki, was the daughter of a huge corporation. Even though Saburo's family wasn't exactly poor since his father was one of the corporation's smaller shareholders, in comparison, his family wasn't as wealthy.

Because of family history, Saburo and Hanako spent their primary and secondary school years first as classmates then as lovers.

Their families approved of their relationship since their families were of somewhat equal footing. Since it was obvious that the young couple was deeply in love, their parents didn't have the heart to stand in the way. They actually wished for them to get married after they graduated from university.

Hanako's parents only had one requirement, and that was for Saburo to not rely on his parent's money to throw Hanako her dream wedding. They needed to make sure Saburo had the capability to provide for their precious daughter.

Since Saburo already had interest in medicine, he decided to focus all his energy to pursue a career in medicine.

In his second year of university, because he wanted to study for his exams, he missed out on a summer trip between the 2 families. Hanako was accompanied by his and her parents, as well as his 8-year-old brother on the trip to the Mediterranean Sea.

"Hanako's plane should arrive at 3 PM today."

Saburo said to himself as he sat in the arrival lobby. He looked at his watch and the clock that hung in the lobby. Both showed 3 PM. However, the screen didn't show that her plane was arriving.

After some asking around, he found out that the plane had to take an emergency pit stop at a small Middle Eastern country due to engine problems. Saburo wasn't alarmed, because the receptionist told him it was only a routine check. Time swam by slowly and finally the plane arrived, but...

"What?! A mysterious virus infection?! The whole plane is now a quarantine zone? Are you kidding me? I didn't hear about such an outbreak on the news!"

No matter how much Saburo begged and argued, the military wouldn't allow him access. After about 10 hours, even the researchers who were tasked with sampling died. The military torched the plane because there was no longer a living soul on it...

Saburo opened his eyes suddenly after a 2-day coma.

While he was unconscious, the bio team had been working non-stop to finish what he started.

Ivan, in his tired state, kept having flashbacks to that fateful year...

Ivan was a child prodigy. He had a natural affinity for the study of biology that was well documented since he was young.

After his graduation from university, he quickly became his home country's best biologist. After publishing a few journals on his study, he even gained some fame across the globe.

In the year 2020, when the oil supplies in the Middle Eastern area started to dry, the continent was thrown into a civil war. It lasted for only 2 years, but it did send an alarm across the many Middle Eastern countries. They were still sitting on money collected from years of exporting oil, but one day, it was going to run out. When that happened, a war for survival much bigger in scale than the one before it was going to happen.

If Ivan had been born in a wealthier Middle Eastern country, his talent could be used in research for alternative income, like draught-resistant seeds. However, since his was a small country, the best choice of defense was offense...

That year, Ivan was forced to host a bio-weapon research, and it had unfortunately leaked...

Chapter 180: A Virus Apocalypse?

After putting on his lab coat, Saburo left the hospital in a hurry. Under Yao Yuan's orders, he was escorted by 2 guards, but Saburo paid them no attention. He had been out for 2 whole days. That combined with the experiment he was conducting alone that lasted for 12 hours meant that the flash frozen troopers only had 12 hours left!

"We must save them! Every single life is important. The government can't abandon these people simply because it might harm the safety of the majority!"

Saburo reached the biology lab in a matter of minutes. Along the way, he tried to get information out of his escorts. He learned that the research on the ultimate vaccine had been taken over by Professor Ivan and his team. Of course, they didn't know much about the details of the experiment since they had been assigned to look after Saburo and not the experiment.

When Saburo entered the lab, he saw about 100 exhausted scientists. They had bloodshot eyes from 48 hours of nonstop lab work. They only allowed themselves short naps that lasted at most for 30 minutes before forcing themselves awake by splashing their faces with cold water. It was a war!

And it was not only Saburo's war, but the Hope's war!

When the scientists noticed Saburo, they asked after his health worriedly. Even though Saburo was heavily agitated, he answered

them politely. Finally, he arrived at Ivan's side, who was by then flushed a sickly red from overexerting his superhuman power.

"Professor Ivan, thank you for your help, but I'll gladly take over if you need some rest," Saburo said seriously.

Ivan shook his head. He put down the data he was reading and leveled a straight stare at Saburo, adding, "Professor Saburo, forgive me, but I can't do that. I won't give you the opportunity to use these vaccines to conduct human experiments. I'm certain that's what you're planning, right?"

Without waiting for Saburo's reply, Ivan smiled knowingly as if he already knew the answer, adding, "Based on the data and the vaccine prototype you've left behind, we've conducted multiple experiments and improvements. What we have now is the third generation vaccine. We've used this new set to experiment on about 100 ZH mice. What do you think was the result?"

"..." Saburo was silent before responding. "If it's the vaccine prototype, it'll have a high probability in causing genetic mutation, but since you're using an improved formula, I suspect the mice's immune system was destroyed, or there was a serious infection due to cellular collapse and possibly death..."

"More than 30 percent of the mice were infected to become alien monsters. 20 percent become afraid of light, violent, and dazed. Another 20 percent's immune system got shut down and they died from air-borne bacterial infection in a mere 10 minutes! The rest showed signs of being poisoned!" Ivan stared at Saburo as he listed the results one by one.

Saburo wasn't fazed. He stared back at Ivan, adding, "However, does this not show that the vaccine is improving? Every scientific breakthrough happens like this! How high could the first plane fly? How many died in the process to create a usable airplane? And look at us now, we're in space! Can you honestly say all the sacrifices along the way were wasted?! It is the same with this ultimate vaccine. I agree, it looks like a bio-weapons now, but how the end product will be depends completely on us! It is us scientists who decide what trajectory this product shall eventually take. A vaccine that could defend against all kind of viruses, bacteria, and microbes; isn't that a service for mankind?"

Ivan shook his head weakly. He started to slump from his standing position before saying, "I believe I'm almost at my limit, so I have to hand the experiment over to you. However, I have to ask, Professor Saburo, what is your next course of action? Do you still plan to conduct human experiments?"

Saburo replied firmly, "I'm not a mad scientist. The vaccine prototype does contain splices of the alien cells, but that is because I wish to investigate the theory behind the cell's ability to mutate across generations to eventually create immunity. Then we'll hopefully be able to replicate this theory in a manmade chemical or biological system. After that we'll use that system as a basis to create stem cells for injections. I'm unfamiliar with the experiment's progress, so I'll need about 1 to 2 hours to familiarize myself before I can decide in detail what we'll be doing next."

Ivan sighed in relief. He relaxed his thumb that secretly hovered over a button. With the press of the button, the experiments' data would be wiped clean. He continued, "Professor Saburo, please

promise me you won't carry any experiments on living human beings. They are innocent, so please don't involve the innocents, promise me..."

"...I promise you," Saburo said through gritted teeth.

As Saburo said that, Ivan fainted. The medical crew who stood nearby quickly went into action. They carried him to the hospital and then the lab was effectively taken over by Saburo.

"The vaccine is at its third generation? Wonderful, this means that we can allow it contact with human cells at this stage. We'll be able to find out more from this interaction..."

Saburo was clear about the experiment's purpose. It was to create a vaccine that could defend against every type of bacteria, microbe, and virus.

From a scientific standpoint, that aim was impossible. There was no vaccine that could realistically defend against every type of disease. The so-called heal-all elixir was stuff of fantasy and sci-fi. Different environmental conditions bred different microorganisms and viruses. The new home planet might look similar to Earth, but the microorganisms it hosted had a wildly different mutation history than the ones found on Earth. One deep breath of the planet's air would introduce about 1,000 to 10,000 different types of viruses, microbes, and bacteria into the body. The numbers might vary depending on forest coverage and overall plant growth, but the variation wouldn't be big. To be fair, some of the viruses might be harmless to the human body; they might even be beneficial for mankind... but as reality had proven, they also

contained strands that were perhaps more vicious than Ebola and AIDS. They were not objectively more vicious; it was because mankind's immunity was as vulnerable as a newborn's when put into such an environment.

If the virus was harmful to the human body, they would not hold back in destroying it!

Even if they abandoned the 20 plus troopers that were infected, mankind still needed to populate the new planet. They couldn't just spend their lives cooped up in the Hope. Therefore, the question of how would they assimilate to the planet's environment arose.

The answer, Saburo believed, lied in the ultimate vaccine. It was the only way mankind could survive on the new planet and any other planets after it!

"The ultimate vaccine's trial prototype is ready. It is created from a replication of the alien cell's immunization system. It is fully manmade and doesn't utilize actual alien cell splices. It can only provide immunity to this planet's viruses, but that should temporarily be enough. We shall work on a more finished product after this crisis is over. The day when mankind no longer has to worry about contracting diseases is deliciously close!"

9 hours after Saburo woke up from his coma, he entered central command with a shot of vaccine. Central command acted as the information and surveillance center for the alien carcasses immolation mission. It also acted as a liaison agent for both the space and ground team working to clear away the monster

carcasses. It was the third day into the mission.

When Saburo approached Yao Yuan, 2 pairs of tired eyes stared at each other. Yao Yuan collected himself and asked hurriedly, "Is the vaccine ready?"

Saburo nodded after a short hesitation, adding, "We have tested the newest vaccine on ZH mice and 70 percent were cured. The next phase would be human experimentation..."

"70 percent?" Yao Yuan sighed. "What about the remaining 30 percent? They've mutated? So it's still an alien cell poison. Plus, didn't I hear thar you promised Ivan to not conduct experiments on innocent humans?"

Saburo was shivering with anger when he replied, "This is a vaccine, not an alien cell poison! It is a medicine created using safe scientific methods! Captain, I won't stand quiet if you're to insult my morality and honor like this! I... I volunteer to be the first human test subject! That way, we won't be harming any innocents!"

Chapter 181: Success

Needless to say, Yao Yuan rejected Saburo's insane offer. This was not only an issue of safety but also Saburo's unique importance. Even though Zhang Heng, Ren Tao, and the likes were exceptionally important to the Hope and were mankind's heroes in their own right, Yao Yuan couldn't just add another Whisperer to the death toll for the sake of an experiment.

If there was no other way forward but human experimentation, Yao Yuan would opt for civilian volunteers, or if all else failed, inmates... Yao Yuan knew it was immoral and inhumane, but to him, Saburo's life was much more important than all the inmates' combined.

However, Saburo said directly, "I'm sorry, Captain, but before I came, I ingested a sample of the planet's air and took a shot of the vaccine. In about 30 minutes, we'll know definitively whether the vaccine is successful or not."

"You?!" Yao Yuan stood from his chair and yelled at Saburo, an angry finger pointing at his face.

Saburo continued firmly, "This vaccine is not infectious. After it enters the human body, it'll react positively with our immune system to create new proteins to kill this planet's viruses, bacteria, and microbes. Of course, if it fails, the disease contracted via exposure to this planet's air could still spread via my bodily fluids. Therefore, I shall place myself under quarantine right this moment following the protocol. I'm sorry, Captain. Hopefully, we shall meet again..." Saburo then bowed deeply at Yao Yuan before

turning to head towards the electromobile waiting outside of central command.

Yao Yuan stood there dumbly, his finger still in the air. He finally sighed. "The command rights will be handed over to Major Guang Zhen. I... have to step down temporarily to deal with the development regarding the planet's virus. Reach out to the Major and ask him to return to the Hope immediately. Over." Yao Yuan then left central command and headed towards the quarantine rooms.

In the next 30 minutes, even though Saburo was kept in quarantine, his situation was wildly different than others. Since he was essentially a lab rat, his body was wired to many machines and his bodily reactions were recorded on a screen outside of his quarantine room.

"His lymphoid system already shows signs of infection, but why hasn't the vaccine given any response?"

A researcher looked at the screen and mumbled to himself.

This had puzzled not only him but the whole room of researchers. This was because the vaccine should have already displayed its effect several minutes into the experiment since it took that long for the vaccine to react within the ZH mice. Naturally, there is a metabolic difference between mankind and mice, but even after taking that into account, some sort of a reaction should have happened at the 30 minutes to 1 hour mark. Weirdly enough, there were no conspicuous changes to Saburo's life signs even though it had already been more than 1 hour since

the experiment started.

Suddenly, Saburo, who had been lying quietly on a cot, started to shiver. What followed, as shown on screen, was a spike in his body temperature.

"He's now at 39 degrees, and it's still increasing... We're over the 40 degree danger mark! It's still not slowing down!" a researcher yelled.

A scientist beside him added hastily, "Give him a shot of Potion A. It should be able to neutralize the vaccine's negative effects. He must have taken a dosage that's too high. This is bad; if this continues, I worry his body will not be able to take it."

After a shot of Potion A was administered by a mechanical arm, Saburo's temperature finally got under control. However, it still hovered at around 39.5 degrees Celsius, and it showed no signs of decreasing beyond that. Saburo by then was already unconscious. If this situation continued, his body would die from overloading before they could even find out whether the vaccine was of any use.

Yao Yuan paced outside the quarantine rooms. Every time news about Saburo came, his frown deepened. He was reading a report on the vaccine's components and their relationship to the virus handed to him by a group of scientists when he heard someone whisper into his ears...

He quickly waved over a soldier, saying, "Go to the Homo

Evolutis Faction immediately and ask them to bring over 3 doses of Formula X. Here, take my ID. Be quick."

The soldier accepted Yao Yuan's ID and saluted. He then took an electromobile and sped to his assigned destination.

The researchers who overheard Yao Yuan were dumbfounded. One of them asked, "Captain, what is this Formula X? Some kind of new medicine?"

"No," Yao Yuan elaborated, "It is a mysterious component secreted by the Homo Evolutis when they use their powers. They help neutralize the load that was placed on our bodies and increase our various bodily functions like reaction time when we're in the Homo Evolutis state. To put it simply, it's a kind of stimulant."

The bunch of researchers looked at one another curiously before one of them said, "But Captain, I don't think it's wise to inject a stimulant into Professor Saburo's body at this juncture... His body is already under a lot of stress, and I fear adding the stimulant into the mix will only make things worse."

Yao Yuan replied firmly, "I know, but doing nothing is not going to help his situation either. The man is stupid enough to use his own body as an experiment, so the least we can do is not let him die foolishly and wastefully like this. We might as well make the most out of it. Furthermore, he is a Homo Evolutis, so the formula should do nothing more than increase the component that is already naturally occurring in his body which in turn will hopefully help stabilize his body conditions..."

10 minutes later, Saburo was injected with Formula X, which was secretly researched by the Homo Evolutis Faction. The shot was clear and looked very much like distilled water. A single dosage of Formula X was only several micrograms in volume. It contained components that was secreted by the human brain when the Homo Evolutis entered his or her superhuman state. Thus far, animal experiments done using Formula X had caused the animals to die from hyperethism within 10 minutes after injection. Such ghastly results were why Formula X was kept a secret.

It was also why there hadn't been any Formula X human experimentation. Yao Yuan held firm that they would not toy with the sanctity of human lives.

In a twist of fate, Saburo also became the first human test subject to try out Formula X...

Time slowly passed by. At the 30 minute mark before the flash frozen troopers would suffer from irrevocable body damage, Saburo's conditions showed drastic changes.

First, his body temperature gained a sudden rise, stopping at 44 degree Celsius. The temperature was high enough to be lethal. It would burn out internal organs and sever brain synapses. This was no laughing matter because even if Saburo was to survive, his IQ would be seriously damaged.

However, the researchers realized right then that his immune system had started to kick in. Initially, after the Saburo was

exposed to the planet's virus, his immune system had completely shut down. However, at this moment, his immune system suddenly decided to start working again, and it began coding special proteins that could combat the pathogens in his body...

In the next 10 minutes, the screen showed that the viruses, microbes, and bacteria in Saburo's body had been completely annihilated. Simultaneously, his body temperature started to drop back to normal levels. The result also showed a high amount of Component X in his body, about 10 times the amount he was injected with. However, weirdly enough, this Component X wasn't secreted by his brain but... by his immune system.

"The reason the ultimate vaccine is dangerous is because it is not a simple antibiotic. In other words, its main purpose isn't to directly engage the pathogen but to evolve the human body's natural immune system. Yes, it's an evolution medicine, one that could evolve mankind's immune system to gain the capability to naturalize to its environment, to create immunity."

"Absolute immunity is scientifically impossible because normally, one antibiotic or vaccine could only react to one or several disease strands. Nonetheless, bacteria as a form of living organisms are always evolving. They become drug-resistant. Our medicine will need to keep on evolving as well to keep up with the bacteria's evolution. However, this limits our research to a single environment, and this means that we won't have the time and resource to focus on the viruses, microbes, and bacteria from other environments."

"The danger of such tunnel-vision in science is obvious. The

troopers we have in quarantine are prime examples. Therefore, instead of following such linear research progress, I believe it is more beneficial that we focus on our immune system instead. If our own defense is strong enough, we won't have to worry about the attacks from different bacteria, microbes, and viruses. Instead of researching for a new vaccine whenever we land on a new planet, with the evolution instigated by the vaccine, our immune system will be able to adapt to the planet's environment and create immunity. I dare say if this experiment is successful... this will be the last time mankind will ever hear of epidemic and disease!"

Yao Yuan read carefully the elaboration on the ultimate vaccine that was left behind by Saburo. He sighed. "Unfreeze all the infected troopers, inject them with the vaccine and Formula X."

Chapter 182: Bionic

Zhang Heng was sprawled on his bed, coughing intermittently. Counting that day, he had been lying on that bed for about half a month. He knew based on his condition that it would be another month before he would be allowed to move about freely.

Zhang Heng was pulled back from the brink of death via injections of the ultimate vaccine and Formula X after being unfrozen. However, that didn't mean that he was safe. On the contrary, his body conditions were still in a critical stage. Yes, his new immune system had started working and had killed off the virus, but his organs that had been damaged were still damaged.

His trachea was greatly punctured and there was internal bleeding in his lungs. An emergency operation had saved his life, but he was unable to speak for the previous 15 days. It was only today that he managed to spit out some monosyllables.

However, his condition wasn't the worst. That unfortunate prize went to one of the Survivors. His entire trachea had to be removed. Thankfully, cloning technology from the 4th revolution was powerful enough to be able to replicate a new trachea from his DNA, but the process needed a few months to complete. Therefore, the man had to survive on his ruined trachea before his assigned operation date. It was a veritable torture, and the man appeared to be suffocating during his every waking moment...

However...

At least he was still alive!

This was a sentiment shared by all the infected troopers. When they were taken out of their flash frozen state, they were barely hanging on to life. If the operation came an hour later, none of them would be alive. Regardless, 3 of them did perish in the process. The ultimate vaccine didn't help because their internal organs were too damaged to be able to code new proteins.

There was another complication to the operation...

And that was an overly effective nervous response system.

The result had shown that after the first injection of the ultimate vaccine and Formula X cocktail, the human immune system would continue to release additional Component X. Saburo and Ivan's research showed that this would eventually peter out. After about a month, the immune system would stabilize and it would stop producing unnecessary Component X. Of course, it would retain its ability to produce immunity against new bacterial threats in the future, but it wouldn't be as impactful as the first time.

This caused 2 unique problems. For one, the infected had a sensation that they were in slow motion all the time. This was most obvious when they watched movies. They could finally understand why movies were called moving pictures, because in their minds, the movies were shown in stills, one picture after another. This affected Saburo the most because unlike other patients who were infected, he still needed to work. Even though his ultimate vaccine was a wild success, the strain it put on the body was still too high, making it unsuitable for non-Homo

Evolutis and children, so he had to continue with his experiment and research.

What did it feel like to have an overly effective nervous response system? It's actually quite easy to describe. When one takes a step forward, in one's mind, the foot has already been lifted off, moved forward, and made contact with the ground. However, in reality, the body hasn't even caught up to the command to lift one's leg. The only consequence was constant tripping. For this, Saburo had visited the hospital many times. The most severe was for a broken arm.

The other side effect was the fatigue. Since the brain was in a constant state of hyperactivity, both the physical and mental state of the patients were definitely strung out. Furthermore, to compensate for the increased metabolism, there had to be a high intake of food. Zhang Heng alone had to consume at least 8 meals each day. That certainly didn't help to deter a sedentary lifestyle.

While the infected was suffering from these inconveniences, the Homo Evolutis Faction was a buzzing hive. With Yao Yuan as chair and Guang Zhen as vice, they were discussing the Formula X's success.

"I believe we should use this method to improve our soldiers' physical attributes."

This was a secret meeting attended by authorities from the Barracks and the Homo Evolutis Faction. The one given the floor was a military expert. Waving a piece of data, he continued, "From our latest war with the alien monsters, it is obvious that our

normal soldiers couldn't compare to the Black Star Troopers. This is beyond the issue of equipment, but rather they lack the necessary intuitive response and the physical condition to support a greater response system.

"Everyone here is a military man or woman, so you should know that bullets fired from common weapons from our 3rd revolution have an initial acceleration of several hundred meters per second, at most 2,000 meters. Their range is short, or at least there won't be a situation where a bullet fired within a planet's ozone layer that could possibly end up outside of it. The best weapon can only manage to take out targets that are beyond the immediate horizon.

"However, now that technology has entered the 4th revolution, it is necessary that our soldiers have improved physical attributes. This is because the electromagnetic shields have pretty much nullified the importance of long-ranged artillery. Combat has gotten closer and more immediate. With the exception of a spaceship's space cannon, most of the combat is going to be limited to on-the-grounds warfare."

The expert continued, "Because of this, our soldiers need to have a better response system and dynamic vision. This will help increase their combat capability by increasing the chance to inflict critical hits on their enemies as well as to evade enemy attacks. This new vaccine enables our bodies to naturally produce Component X, and the only negative effect observable so far is longer fatigue and increased appetite.

"Therefore, our team's plan is to use the new cocktail to induce an evolution in our soldiers' bodies. When combat reaches its

height, a shot of harmless bacteria and nutrients can be used as a trigger. This way it acts as a drug. Granted their prowess won't be as powerful as the troopers', at least that will put them at a more level playing field. Yes, there is the fatigue to contend with, but our team feels that overall it is a worthy price to pay!"

After the expert descended from the stage, Guang Zhen took his spot. He began, "I have something to add to this. First, it is undeniable that the Black Star Troopers are incredibly strong, but we have so few of them. After this war with the flesh alien, we've lost about 30 of them. That is not a small number for a unit that totals at just over 100 members. Let's not forget that this is just one war. If this continues, we'll be shutting down the entire Black Star Troopers unit pretty soon.

Therefore, I agree with the need to improve our soldiers' physical attributes. Future warfare will be centered on close quarter combat, as the expert before me just explained. Other than the improvement in weapons technology and grounds transports that we've discussed, I truly believe it is time to initiate the bionic project."

As the Hope's second-in-command, Guang Zhen's words carried more weight than the expert's. Even Yao Yuan had to consider what he had to say.

Yao Yuan took the podium after Guang Zhen. He said, "I believe everyone here has a report on the bionic project. I'll be honest, ever since the inception of Homo Evolutis Faction, we have been working on research that investigate why and how a common person turns into a Homo Evolutis, but with our current

technological level, the research has hit a wall at every turn. The only success we have so far is the identification of Component X that appears within the Homo Evolutis' bloodstream whenever they activate their power.

"First, even though there are now 20 plus successful examples of inducing an evolution in our immune system with a cocktail of Formula X and Saburo's ultimate vaccine, it is worth noting that all these success stories are about the Homo Evolutis. They already had Component X in their systems to begin with."

Yao Yuan's tone got serious as he continued, "Before this, the researchers from Homo Evolutis Faction tried experimenting this Formula X on animals, and there hasn't been a single survivor, so they have come up with a hypothesis...

"Could it be that non-Homo Evolutis can't support Formula X? Therefore, even though the bionic project is incredibly alluring, the fatalities that it could cause might be greater than what anyone of us here could have predicted. I dare say a 100 percent fatality rate is not impossible, so I have to announce that...

"Until the safety of the project is ascertained, the bionic project will be indefinitely delayed. Dismissed!"

Chapter 183: The Confinement Order and Logging Order

It had been a month since the war with the mother nest...

In the past month, news was sent through either Hope Weekly, the Barracks, or the government bodies to the general public. The civilians finally knew of the danger they had been in, the underground death trap, the sea of fleshy monsters, and the threat of the mother nest. Even though the war was officially over, news of such dangers still brought fear into people's hearts.

More names were added to the Remembrance Hall, and the fear slowly dissipated in the past month. Now it was completely replaced by an excitement to see the planet outside of the Hope!

Currently, the Hope was suspended at a spot 3,000 meters above the hole it was once in. The scenery wasn't entirely inviting since the place had suffered 3 alien monster assaults. The area had the highest monster body count and was covered with broken body parts. It was one of the main focuses for the Hope's cleaning efforts.

The defense unit was split into 6 squadrons, each with 500 people for the cleaning purposes. The workload couldn't be considered heavy because their daily working hours only lasted for 8 hours. The biggest pressure came from the possibility of ambush by surviving monsters. After all, the defense unit wasn't good at close quarters combat. One or two surviving monsters might tear through their ranks if they were not careful.

That was why their squadrons worked in rotations. Some rested while other worked. This way they could keep an eye out for each other.

Of course, these were not the concerns of the citizens. They were only interested in when could they take the transport shuttle to the ground.

The desire to see the blue sky and touch the green grass was palpable!

Everyone knew there was bound to be danger waiting for them since this was, after all, an unfamiliar alien planet. Nobody knew what kind of dangerous animals might be lying in wait for them. A cute rabbit-type critter might kill with its hidden fangs. One simply couldn't be too careful.

However, these possible threats paled in comparison to the people's desire for a new home planet. Some of the more hot-blooded youths had even formed crews among themselves, petitioning the Hope to allow them to survey the area around the ship. They wanted to document the scenery because they detailed an important part of human history. At the same time, they could find out more about the planet's unique ecosystem, like documentation of its herbivores and carnivores as well as edible flora, like roots, leaves, fungi, or even herbs. Chinese legends said consumption of certain herbs could allow one to fly above the sky. Who knows, maybe there were such plants on this planet. Anything was possible in the great cosmos.

In conclusion, there were great expectations for this planet. With the passage of time and the signs of enemies decreasing, even though they knew that the planet's native life forms might still posed their unique dangers, the public was restless and eager to get down to the planet's surface.

However, with such demands, the government had more things to worry about.

First and foremost, how to ensure the civilians' safety if they were allowed down to the planet. The obvious danger of the straggling monsters aside, there were the planet's native flora and fauna to contend with. There were simply too many unknowns. Would the animals be harmless or harmful to human presence? Nobody could tell for sure. And who was to say the plants wouldn't pose some sort of danger? Even Earth had rumors of man-eating plants, much less an alien planet. Yao Yuan himself had run into a species of vampiric vines that was native to the tropical rainforest. Thankfully, he reacted quickly then, or else there wouldn't be a Hope today.

To conclude, carelessness could spell doom when venturing into a new environment. The Hope was already lacking in military number. Yao Yuan went as far as considering sending out the recovering troopers into the field. That spoke volumes of how much Yao Yuan was in need of capable men.

If he allowed the civilians passage to the new planet, should they be escorted by the military? If not, who would be responsible if something were to go wrong? He was sure the blame would fall on him, the captain of the ship.

On the other hand, if he were to allow military escorts? How big would the unit be? Several hundred or thousands? Currently, the Hope had about 100,000 in population, and the number would increase to over 170,000 if adding in the children that were less than 4 years old. Allowing one group of civilians to visit the planet would lead to another demanding the same treatment. Allowing only a section of the people to leave couldn't possibly work because it would lead to libelous rumors against the government, citing favoritism.

Therefore, even though Yao Yuan understood the public's desire to descend onto the new planet, he maintained his stance that only military personnel were allowed to go outside of the Hope.

Nonetheless, he was quickly faced with another problem... The Academy too demanded access to the new planet.

The Academy's request was harder to deny because the reasons behind their demand were valid. They wanted to carry out experiments and analyses on the new planet. Things like the planet's mineral composition, and the intricacies of the planet's food webs couldn't be revealed by the Hope's scanning devices. That was why the researchers hoped to continue the previously halted sampling process. Ivan himself had handed in 3 requests. This was, after all, his area of interest, a new ecosystem to analyze and study.

Demands from the Academy and the public found support in each other and grew louder as the days went by.

Simultaneously, reports from the defense unit who had been on the ground came trickling back. First was an update on the cleaning mission. After a month, all of the carcasses in a 300 meter radius around the Hope had been cleaned. They needed to expand their perimeter.

However, they stumbled into a problem. A lush and wide jungle terrain stood in their way. In reality, the planet had a warm and wet atmosphere that was perfect for forest growth. 60 percent of the planet was jungle, and they were separated by the occasional grasslands and deserts.

This was, of course, a good thing, for it meant a wealth of natural resources. However, it had proven to be a headache-inducing problem when they were hunting down the monsters.

The defense unit consisted of normal human beings with military training. Their speed couldn't catch up to the monsters' enhanced mobility. They could stand a chance in the open grasslands, but jungles provided cover for the monsters to ambush the defense unit.

Because of this, the cleaning mission was halted. After an emergency meeting, the Barracks came up with a solution, and that was dispatch low-flying modified shuttles to first scan the jungle area. Cleaning efforts would be focused on spots where signs of large animal presence or alien monster-like presence were picked up.

The military still couldn't wander aimlessly into the jungle, so in total, Yao Yuan released 2 orders. They were the Confinement

Order and Logging Order.

The Confinement Order was jointly released by the government and the Barracks. It required non-military personnel to ask for clearance before stepping out of the Hope. Failure to obey the order would result in detention under the crime of actively harming human survival since the person would bring the planet's viruses back to the Hope. If convicted, the guilty party would serve 3 to 5 years in prison. For serious offenders, the sentence could be increased to 10 years!

The Logging Order, even though it was a military order, due to its sensitive nature, was released through the Hope Weekly. It allowed the clean-up crew to commit deforestation whenever the sensor picked up suspicious activities of possible monster stragglers. The range of actions permitted included burning less than 10 acres of forest land, infinite logging, and killing of any wildlife...

Chapter 184: A Secret Meeting

"Yao Yuan, I heard you're leaving the Hope for a mission."

This was the second day after Yao Yuan released his two orders, and he sat in command central waiting patiently to be peppered with opinions and criticism. However, he didn't expect the first one to visit him to be Qi Xiao Niao.

Yao Yuan frowned and said, "You heard wrong. I'm the captain, why would I assign myself an outstation mission? I need to be here to keep the ship afloat and the government running."

"Huh? Really?" Xiao Niao said in an excessively surprised tone. "But don't you need to evade the crowd for a while after the release of the Containment Order and Logging Order? Aren't you afraid the parties that want to get down to the surface and the nature lovers are going to crowd your office and question your decision? What do you say, shall we go down there for a temporary reprieve?"

Yao Yuan's frown deepened as he activated his Thinker power. He tried to tease out the underlying meaning in what Xiao Niao was saying.

For one, Xiao Niao was personally present when they were discussing the release of those 2 orders. He should understand that the release was necessary to protect humanity from the dangers of their human desire. With Xiao Niao's brilliance, he should know as much.

For another, even though Yao Yuan would be annoyed by those parties that would come bearing opinions and criticisms, he wished to meet them. He preferred to discuss his decision with these parties face-to-face to calm and inform them instead of allowing them to spread false rumors around the ship. As the captain, how could he have escaped due to fear of criticism? Where was he going to put his face then?

However, since Xiao Niao had purposely come to say such things, he must have something else in mind. As one of the only two Thinkers on the Hope, he couldn't not see the two orders' actual purpose. He must have been vying for another angle, but what could it be?

Is it...

Yao Yuan asked suddenly, "Why? Do you intend to follow me if I go on this reprieve?"

Xiao Niao snickered and said, "Of course. I too have the desire to see the blue sky, green grass, and plants. Instead of going on some mission, I'd rather follow you on a holiday."

Yao Yuan thought about it before adding with a nod, "Alright, we'll go on this 'holiday' as you call it, but to be sure, I want you to go for a body check. There's no medical help out there if you suddenly fall sick."

Xiao Niao laughed as he pulled out a medical report from his

coat. "I've predicted as much. Since we're going on a holiday, there has to be a body check, so here you go. As you can see, I'm not down with any 'virus.'"

Yao Yuan read the report wordlessly. He focused on the part about Xiao Niao's genetic mapping. The report was signed by Ivan and a few other scientists. Xiao Niao was clean as a whistle.

(It is as I've expected, he has some secret that he wants to tell me, something that can't be revealed while we're on the Hope. Since the report states clearly that he's not under the control of some alien monster... Fine, he probably has something important to say.)

Yao Yuan thought about it some more. Currently, the Hope was running along just fine, there were no reports of emergency disasters, and Guang Zhen had a good hand over the military. The cleaning crews were going through the motions, and the Hall of Communications was handling the administrative part of the government well. It was absolutely fine for him to excuse himself for a few hours, even though it might disappoint the few parties that wanted to meet him to discuss the 2 orders. Yao Yuan laughed, thinking they would end up believing he was running because he was too afraid to meet them in person.

The two of them moved to the hangar and put on their space armor. After Yao Yuan put on his red space armor, Xiao Niao said, "How about we take one of the newer transport shuttles? They are the updated models that haven't been field tested yet. We can take one and kill two birds with one stone."

Yao Yuan frowned and his brain started churning, but he didn't voice his thoughts out loud. He merely nodded. He noticed that unlike him, Xiao Niao hadn't reached for his weapons or gear, and it didn't appear like he was going to do so. "That's not a bad idea. Wait here, I'll go fill in the required forms."

With Yao Yuan piloting, the pair left the Hope in the biggest transport shuttle the ship had. It moved further and further away from the Hope until the blue sea came into their view. Yao Yuan landed the shuttle on an isolated stretch of the beach and stared intently at Xiao Niao.

To his surprise, Xiao Niao said, "Aren't you going to activate the creator's particles generator? Aren't you afraid those people are able to locate you? In the meantime, I'm going to go for a stroll. I wonder if this planet has crustaceans, like crabs."

Without waiting for a response, Xiao Niao strode towards the exit.

Yao Yuan took the hint and activated the shuttle's creator's particle generator. The shuttle was a new model and was still in need of modifications. It was more of an armored shuttle than a transport shuttle. It had a built-in creator's particle generator and a small polymerized reactor.

After Yao Yuan descended from the shuttle, he realized that Xiao Niao had wandered outside of the 100 meter range that was unaffected by the creator's particle. He walked to him wordlessly until he was within 1 meter of Xiao Niao. Only then did he ask, "Get on with it; what is it that made you act so weirdly? Could it be that

you feel you're being monitored on the Hope?"

Xiao Niao checked his status using his space armor, and after he made certain that they were in the creator's particle coverage, he admitted, "I am... no, we are being monitored, but I'm not sure who or what is doing the monitoring."

Yao Yuan frowned and asked, "What do you mean?"

Xiao Niao structured his thoughts and explained, "I'll reveal everything to you in detail. It started way before you realized I was a Homo Evolutis. That day me, Qiu Qiu, and Dan Dan were playing a game of Star Craft 3 in the internet café when..."

Xiao Niao spoke at length until he concluded, "I have no idea what this is ZERO. To be honest, I thought she was just a random troll before this war we had with the mother nest. After all, what she was saying was simply impossible.

"However, she made true to her words, and we did stumble into a Zerg-like alien. It is impossible to tell whether this mother nest and the Zerg were one and the same, but you have to admit that their unique characteristics were way too similar. Even my latest conversation with ZERO proved that ZERO herself believed the mother nest was the Zerg. Can you believe this was all a coincidence? Or to put it another way, do you think a random nobody could make something that was obviously said in frustration a reality?"

Yao Yuan frowned and asked, "Do you mind if I ask what is this

Star Craft 3? Is it a video game?"

Xiao Niao rolled his eyes, but he still patiently explained the game, especially emphasizing on the Zerg, their image, and their unique combat system.

"...Like I said, the Zerg in Star Craft 3 is an alien species that relies on absorbing genes from multiple species to evolve its own body to adapt to the space environment. Its battle mechanics is almost the same as the mother nest that we've countered, which is a heavy reliance on the advantage of numbers."

"In other words, you suspect that this ZERO was behind our latest warp? She made us come into contact with the mother nest to prove to you that she is not a noob and that the actual Zerg exists in space?"

Xiao Niao shrugged. "That is why we're here. There is obviously something that I don't know about the Hope. Do you know how much pressure I was under to schedule this meeting? On one hand, I needed to make sure ZERO couldn't find out what I was up to, and on the other, to persuade you that I have important things to tell you but only in secret. The preemptive medical report to ensure I wasn't infected by the alien and the deliberate motion to leave my weapons behind, the hoops I had to jump through. So how about it? Are you going to tell me the Hope's secret?"

Yao Yuan hesitated only slightly before saying, "You do have the clearance to know about it, but I need you to promise that you won't reveal anything to your two friends..."

Xiao Niao answered immediately, "I never intended to tell them in the first place. I didn't even tell them about my latest conversation with ZERO."

Yao Yuan continued, "In a hidden compartment underneath the Hope's mainframe, we found the source of the ship's future-tech devices for things like the anti-gravitational system and space-warping technology... It was an UFO, the one initially found by the US government in Tennessee."

"UFO? Inside the Hope?" Xiao Niao was shocked, then he questioned, "Are you pulling my leg? Why didn't the eloped government official take off with it if it's something that important?"

Yao Yuan replied with frustration, "I've been bothered by that too. There are still many mysteries surrounding this UFO, but one thing is certain: the UFO is real, and it is definitely the source of all the future-tech currently on the Hope..."

"Could it be that... ZERO is the UFO's AI?"

Chapter 185: Embryo of the Mother Nest...

Yao Yuan and Xiao Niao's secret meeting didn't reach a conclusion, but there was one thing that was certain: even though this ZERO might not be the UFO's AI, she was an entity that held sway over the Hope's space-warping technology. To be more specific, she could decide the warp exit.

The threat of the cosmos was its size. It might not present itself as an active threat, but its pure existence alone would bring despair to any life forms. This was because its size was impossible; it bypassed all given logic.

If the cosmos was described as an ocean, then the planets would be something smaller than the water particles in the sea. To enable the Hope to wrap into a star system, or in the most recent case, into the ground of a planet, was something impossible. The probability of that happening could be equated to winning the lottery every day for a whole year!

However, the reality was that it did happen. Making it happen once might be a random luck, but it happened again and again. The Hope had committed to more than 100 warps, and a great majority of them was near or within a star system. One had to wonder, could this still be called random?

In fact, before Xiao Niao came to him, Yao Yuan already had his own suspicions. And it was shared by Ren Tao. However, it was merely suspicion. They had no proof to say that the warp was controlled by someone or something, and that thing was the UFO.

The secret meeting didn't exactly add light to ZERO's identity, but it wasn't entirely fruitless either. At least they knew that the space warps could be controlled to a certain degree. The actual mechanics still eluded them, but it was a start. Furthermore, they were relieved that this ZERO didn't appear to wish to harm mankind.

"In any case, your biggest responsibility now is to find out this ZERO's identity. Of course, you can't just go ahead and ask her directly. Befriend her first and get to know each other. However, no matter what you do, don't get on her bad side; endear mankind to her if possible." After Yao Yuan found out about ZERO's existence, he nagged at Xiao Niao like he was his mom. In a way, he was giving Xiao Niao a mission, but it was one that didn't involve any fights.

Xiao Niao laughed garrulously. "Look at who you're talking to. It is not for nothing that I'm known as the Love Master within the Black Star Troopers. As if I need your help to teach me how to chase after girls. Just leave it to me."

Yao Yuan frowned, but he kept his mouth shut because after he thought about it, he suspected that this ZERO approached Xiao Niao because he didn't have a hidden agenda. If he told Xiao Niao to change his MO, it might raise red flags. ZERO would get suspicious of their intentions, and who knew what tragedy that might entail?

If Xiao Niao's two best friends were there, they would not hesitate to point out that Xiao Niao was blowing his own trumpet. The whole Love Master thing was a straight up lie. Xiao Niao had

no relationship experience and was a virgin. His boastfulness was to hide his own insecurities.

The pair returned to the shuttle to get back to the Hope, each nursing their own thoughts.

When they were within the 100 meters range of the Hope, the intermission said that the shuttle was to be taken over by the Barracks. After the shuttle landed inside the hangar, the two of them went through the decontamination room. Yao Yuan believed that the takeover was because they had given false alarm by activating the creator's particle away from the Hope. He even rebuked Xiao Niao for it.

It wasn't until Guang Zhen rushed over with a bunch of troopers in company that Yao Yuan knew that something serious had happened.

Without wasting any time, he asked, "What happened? The Hope is under attack? Or we discovered a giant monster?"

Guang Zhen passed him a photograph, adding, "Look at this. This was taken by the defense unit about 30 minutes ago. They were given the order to clear this area of the forest, but after a subunit was sent to the area, 2 soldiers mysteriously disappeared. After they returned to the Hope following a failed search, the Hope's radar picked up a genetic mesomeric action at a location 50 meters underneath the surface."

Yao Yuan gave the picture a close look. It showed a dark brown

patch of land that had a different coloration from its surroundings. It looked like a combination of dirt and muscle.

"A mother nest embryo... So what's next? Why didn't we just destroy it? Insert high volume explosives underground and blow it up from within!" Yao Yuan ordered instantly.

Before Guang Zhen could reply, a voice came from behind him. "We can't do that. It is not so easily destructible." The person who said that was Ivan. He led a group of scientists.

Yao Yuan frowned. "Why not? Don't tell me you want to experiment with it. I'll not allow it! I might consider it if it's one of those flesh monsters, but we can't let this embryo fester. This thing has to be eliminated, or it'll be a pain in the butt in the future. I'm more than willing to give up the scientific discovery that would result from its analysis than leave such a potential threat to our future generation! You have to understand that this is going to be our new home planet, not the ruined Moon 2. If you still think the experimentation is worth it, just look at what Moon 2 has become. It's a complete death planet! Furthermore, after we clean up everything here, I have plans to clear up Moon 2 as well, so don't even think about persuading me to let the Academy keep this thing!"

Ivan chuckled mirthlessly as he said, "I believe Captain might have misunderstood us. We have no intention of keeping this thing to experiment on. We are on the same wavelength; the Academy also wishes to leave a clean planet for our future generations to enjoy. For that, we have a proposal that could remove this threat completely with one go."

Yao Yuan scratched his face in thought. After some time, he said, "Alright, I'll hear you out. If it's worth the effort, I'll allow it. If not, I'll order the Barracks to blow it up immediately."

Ivan turned to a middle-aged woman that stood beside him. She nodded at Ivan as she came forward. "Captain, I am Peto Nora, an entomologist. My research interest has been in the similarities between the flesh aliens and bugs ever since the war began. To be honest, I have to say that my research couldn't have been so successful without Zhang Heng's help. He allowed us a greater and deeper contact with this alien race.

"In short, this alien race has many similarities with bug civilizations, like bees and ants. They have a hive mind. However, there exists some minor differences between the two, most notably being the alien's hive mind is concentrated on the mother nest... Anyway, now is not the time to get into the details. Based on our current observations, the mother nest's hive mind only has one purpose, and that is to instigate cellular renewal for the sake of consumption... Then it brings us to the question: how come the mother nest couldn't regrow itself from the remaining alien monsters or even just splices of alien DNA?

"Therefore, we feel the mother nest might have some sort of unique method that prevents its cells from splitting this way. This is why we've seen that no matter how big these cells grow, as long as it has been separated from the mother nest, it will not evolve into another mother nest..."

Yao Yuan nodded along.

The middle-aged woman continued, "Because of this, we have a hypothesis that if there is already a mother nest, there won't be another. This leads us to an extended hypothesis that for this alien, each of its monster types is unique. For example, the squishy foot soldiers are the only close-quarter combat type, and the giant meat blob is its only transportation type. Back to the issue at hand, this means that if we don't destroy this mother nest embryo, it means that we will never have to deal with a new mother nest."

"But this is no reason to keep this embryo alive. If there's another mother nest embryo that appears, we will similarly hunt it down; we will not give it the chance to grow," replied Yao Yuan.

"But what if the next embryo grows at a location that evades our detection? Like in the middle of the ocean? Like what Lieutenant Zhang Heng had said, we have no clue whether this alien can only survive on land. In other words, we should consider ourselves lucky that this new embryo was found on land."

Xiao Niao, who had been quiet, suddenly piped up. "Wait, you previously mentioned bees and ants. Don't tell me..."

The middle-aged woman nodded. "It seems like you've guessed our plan. Yes, it's correct, we plan to use this embryo as bait to lure the rest of monsters back to its location. The plan is actually very simple. Because the alien has a hive mind, every single monster out there technically is a part of it. They will not shy away from saving its brain. Therefore, we should keep this embryo and limit its growth by burning it once in a while. That will also provide the necessary stimulus for the monsters that are hiding on the planet

to come save it.

"With a good army stationed around the embryo, we'll be able to eliminate the remaining aliens in one go!"

Chapter 186: The True Ending

Yao Yuan had another secret meeting to discuss the entomologist's proposal.

There were two arguments that were brought forth in the meeting even though they were basically the extensions of a singular one, which were: does the flesh alien have intelligence? If they do, was such an obvious exposure of its embryo a trap? Could it be possible that the exposed embryo was just a useless extension of its body, like the tail part of the lizard?

It could have used this method to lull mankind into a false sense of security. When mankind was certain they had the alien under control, it actually had another part hidden away from sight that was growing into another mother nest.

This was entirely possible. If the alien had sentient intelligence, the possibility of this happening was more than 70 percent.

The counter-argument cited the mother nest's action when it was being pushed into the sun. If it had any semblance of intelligence, it would have known what mankind was up to. However, it was primitive enough to only focus on evolving into the supercell and passively allowing itself to be pushed into the sun. Furthermore, various surveillance videos had shown that the mother nest had reached the supercell level moments before it was pushed into the sun. Theoretically speaking, it could have used the newly acquired technology to absorb and grow from the solar winds. However, it didn't do so. It resisted the sun's gravitational pull when it should have leaned into its force and used the energy from the sun's

gravity and solar winds to align itself into the sun's orbit.

This proved that the flesh alien's intelligence was still primitive. Its basic understanding still equated the sun to death. The alien technically could be said to be sentient, but it wasn't an intelligent sentience. It had something that was more of a basic instinct. Its only missions were to consume and to evolve.

There was equal support on both sides. For example, Guang Zhen was adamant that there was a hidden growing mother nest elsewhere, because the location for this one was too obvious. It had to be a trap. There was no way it wasn't a trap. It was biding its time, waiting for mankind to lose its vigilance and then it would strike, like how it did with the aquatic civilization!

Therefore, Guang Zhen was totally for burning it up. Not only this embryo, any other places on this planet that appeared to be suspicious needed to be neutralized. He even guaranteed that none of the monsters in hiding would come to save this mother nest, because they would be too busy protecting the actual nest.

On the other hand, both Xiao Niao and Ren Tao, who were still recovering, were of the other opinion. Both Thinkers believed that the embryo's vulnerability was real and the plan could work. The reason was simple: if the alien did have high intelligence, mankind would have been dead when it evolved to become the supercell. There was no need for it to drag the whole thing out unless it had a sadistic streak, which it didn't appear to possess. It could have easily gotten mankind's DNA when it was at its supercell stage, so there was no need for it to jump through all these unnecessary hoops.

Arguments kept on mounting from both sides, each with support from their own scientists and experts. They reached a stalemate, and finally both decided to pass the decision to Yao Yuan.

Yao Yuan was caught in the fray. Instinctually, he was on Guang Zhen's side. It was better to rid mankind of this huge problem before it could fester into something worse. It was for the sake of their future generations. They were the pioneers, so they couldn't leave a huge problem for their future generations to handle.

However, rationally, he was on Xiao Niao and Ren Tao's side. Logically speaking, the flesh alien wouldn't have a high IQ; otherwise, it would have squash mankind when it had the chance. There was no need for it to lose and then restart everything from its embryonic stage just to toy with them. Furthermore, Guang Zhen's plan was going to cause irreparable damage to the new home planet's flora and fauna.

In the end, he settled for something that was in the middle. He announced, "I'll go for a plan that utilizes benefits from both sides. First, we'll use the bait plan and see whether any monsters will come to its rescue. Secondly, the surveillance crew is going to continue its work, but there will be limitations on the scope of deforestation. The focus will be on detecting abnormal growths underneath the planet's surface.

"The operation will be called... Operation Bait."

So a weirdly named operation was born. Most of the defense unit

was assigned to surveillance and scanning duty using the shuttles since they were not suited for close quarters combat. The troopers, on the other hand, were separated into 3-member teams to conduct the ambush part of Operation Bait. They were ordered to kill any monsters that emerged from the embryo, or any monsters that ran into their perimeter.

Both parties carried on with their assigned orders for a month. A month later, the troopers had killed about 70,000 monsters, while the defense unit located 2 more mother nest embryos...

It turned out that both sides had something wrong and something right.

With the discovery of 2 other mother nest embryos, the Bait Operation was extended to cover 3 distinct locations. The Hope's surveillance team utilized everything at its disposal to search the planet, its deep mountains and deep seas especially, for more mesomeric actions, but it couldn't pick up any more of those signs. They were certain there were only 3 mother nest embryos on the planet.

To compensate for the workload increase, the Black Star troopers were also separated into 3 parties, each responsible for one embryo. After another month, none of the troopers came across any other returning monsters. Yao Yuan finally ordered everyone to return after they destroy the 3 embryos.

Other than that, he gave an order to the Hope's surveillance unit that they use their best device to scan every corner of the new planet on the 1st of every month. This order was to be continued

after his death. In other words, as long as human civilization continued to exist, the order would have to be obeyed.

Lastly, the cleanup crew would be cut to 100 members, but they would continue on with their responsibility to burn any spots that they considered suspicious. This too was to be continued after his death. The size of this crew would only increase with 100 as its minimum.

However, at this juncture, everyone could finally sigh in relief. They had finally reached the true ending with regards to this flesh alien. It meant that mankind finally had a new home planet. Needless to say, there was another huge celebration that lasted for 3 days following the defense unit and Black Star Troopers' heroic returns...

"What? The House of Representatives is discussing the validity of the Confinement Order?"

This was after the long celebration and Yao Yuan was back at the captain's room going through the documents that had piled up over time. This was his response when he heard Barbie updated him on things that were happening on the political end.

Barbie waved her hands with much frustration as she added, "Well, it's not actually entered the official discussion yet. It's just that some of the representatives are questioning the validity of the Confinement Order on the side, and a select few of them had some... less than pleasurable views."

Yao Yuan smiled as he put down the document. "Go into the details. We've worked with each other for so long; you know I'm not the kind of person to order political execution."

Barbie hesitated before revealing, "These people are saying the reason the government is not doing away with the Confinement Order is because it wants to continue its autocratic reign of the Hope's citizens. It is afraid that when people start colonizing the new planet, the new countries and governments will pose a threat to the government's authority and validity. The Confinement Order is to ensure that the people will not have the sovereignty and a land to call its own so that it will not be threatening to the Hope's government..."

Yao Yuan lost his smile, and his expression gradually became serious. After a long while, he said, "They're right. The Hope's government was indeed created in a rush, and we eventually have to open the home planet to the people... In that case, I believe the time is ripe to create an actual and valid central government. I can't allow the same thing that happened on Earth to repeat itself on this planet, so the creation of hundreds of countries is impossible! Mankind does need a government, and the arrival of a new home planet means that we no longer have to wander around aimlessly in space and expose ourselves to various dangers. As long as there is no civil war on a gigantic scale, it is safe to say that human civilization will not meet its end, especially after we've entered the 4th revolution..."

"So, after the mass release of the Ultimate Vaccine, we should think about setting up the constitution."

Chapter 187: The Starting Plan

However, setting up a constitution was more complicated than saying it out loud.

The constitution was the groundwork for the country in which it will be implemented. When its government violates its constitution, it means that the government has started to rot from its core. Therefore, the constitution is going to decide the path the country is going to take for as long as the country is alive. How to draft a good constitution and ensure that it is paired with a reliable executive power is something that has to be discussed over a long period of time. For the Hope, that period would be as long as 10 years.

To be frank, Yao Yuan had no intention of retiring; he wanted to continue governing for the next 100 years. After all, according to the doctors, with the genetic mesomeric technology, he could live well into his 200s. He was the perfect candidate for presidency, and moreover, he was not one to do things half way. Since the responsibility to lead mankind fell onto his shoulders, he felt it was only responsible for him to continue on doing it to the best of his ability.

Under his leadership, he promised that mankind would have a strong, powerful, and most importantly, united government. The government would not allow the things that transpired on Earth to repeat itself. A small planet with over 100 countries. Each keeping technological secrets and resources from one another, causing international frictions that eventually led to wars. Yao Yuan's government would not allow that to happen.

Of course, a unified government came with its own downfalls too, the most conspicuous being the lack of individual autonomy...

The political sphere of 21st century Earth might have had its own slew of problem, but there is one good thing that is worth admiring: the freedom of choice. With the exception of the few isolated countries, residents of most countries had the choice to migrate to another country if the ideals of their original country's government couldn't fit their worldview.

However, if there is only one government, even though there won't be the complicated issue of diplomacy, once the government starts to rot and become autocratic, the leaders of such a government usually have control over the military, so the citizens will have no choice but to suffer silently and indefinitely as slaves!

It is thanks to the freedom of choice that free market became a possibility. Politically speaking, it also encourages healthy competition between governments. The possibility of having a closed-off autocratic country is greatly lowered because other countries would step in to intervene. It might not even be an active intervention because the country will eventually fall into starvation when it is isolated by the international community. One of the most important assets of a country is its citizens. This is because they are the sole force that will bring the government's vision into fruition. Suppressing them is never a good idea when one wishes for a vibrant and powerful country.

In other words, Yao Yuan still had a lot of things to be done.

First, with the arrival of the home planet, mankind could no longer survive under the same governing system as they had on the Hope. To hold a spaceship full of people from different backgrounds together, Yao Yuan had to rely on an autocratic system, to pull the Hope's citizens together with one voice.

However, with the home planet, it was expected that mankind would not unnecessarily risk migration through the wide cosmos in the next hundred or even thousands of years. This was due to the uncertainty of the warp system. They could warp out of the planet, but it would be impossible for them to return. Furthermore, their 4th revolution stage meant that they still hadn't mastered curvature navigation, which meant that their range of travel was limited to the star system within the next hundreds to thousands of years.

Then again, that was already a big enough space to explore. The star system they were in had 8 planets, of which 5 were terrestrial and 3 were gas giants. There were 2 meteorite clusters and about 19 moons. Other than the ruined Moon 2, all of the other celestial entities represented important resources. The 4th revolution allowed mankind to terraform planets, but it was limited by the distance from the sun. Temperature was a verifiable worry. Luckily, they had another technology: construction of underground space stations. In other words, other than the gas giants, any other terrestrial planets in the system could be colonized by mankind.

Even though the Hope currently had several tens of thousands people, if there was no giant natural disaster, based on mankind's medical technology, the government's policy, birth support, as well as an elongated lifespan, it would not be crazy to expect the

number to grow up to ten million people.

In conclusion, the Hope's way of governing couldn't be continued. Even though it could still carry on with Yao Yuan's high popularity and pressure from the military, forced autocracy could only go on for another 10 years before mutiny occurred.

Therefore, the creation of a valid government, the construction of the government's various departments, as well as a more democratic governing system were necessary...

"...No, the republic system is, theoretically speaking, a forced political compromise. This has been obvious since the Ancient Greeks' time. It is because the multiple tribes were so close to each other in power that they couldn't possibly find an agreeable leader that they settled on a circle of elders which eventually evolved into the known republic system. If we select from the more modern countries, it is almost similar to how Washington envisioned America..."

"Academician An... It is too rash to equate the Greek's republic system with Washington's. They might have the same roots, but the eras they were born in were too different for us to equate them as one and the same. I'll be the first to admit that there are various loopholes when it comes to the American political system, but it is not without its positive points as well..."

"Both respected learners, I still feel it is best that we draft the policies according to the Hope's current situation. It is of no use for us to refer back to these old systems when we're in a completely brand new environment..."

These were the arguments put forwards by the group of political science experts, sociologists, and the Hope's current government leaders. This was not the first time they had the discussion about the Hope's government future governing policies, but each of the experts had their own opinions. Since the policy would decide the constitution which would then form the country for possibly thousands of years, none was willing to compromise. Even within the widely accepted separation of power policy, there were nuanced differences that separated the experts into opposing groups. It was practically wishful thinking for one to want them to discuss these things with an open mind.

This was half a month after the 3 mother nest embryos were burnt. The Hope was still floating at an elevation of 3,000 meters above the ground. However, the Hope had moved from its initial location of the battlefield to a delta plain.

This was a location that was similar to the Amazon plateau. It had a 1 kilometer wide river snaking through it before separating into streams as it met the ocean. This unique environment created verdant grasslands and a lush forest further inland. The location had access to fresh water and a deep riverbed that was suitable for transportation. The lagoons near the ocean that would be perfect for piers. In other words, it was the perfect spot for a starting city.

In Xiao Niao's terms, this would be a good city tile. If only there was a luxury item tile, like iron, gold, diamond, or sugar nearby, then it would be perfect.

Viewed from the Hope's window, everyone could see the blue

ocean that stretched to the horizon and the green knolls as well as woodlands. The untouched slice of nature was at least 100 times better than Earth's Hawaii or Eagean Sea.

It was a natural paradise!

This spot was selected after extensive discussion between Yao Yuan and the two Thinkers, as well as many academicians, researchers, scientists, and Guang Zhen. They all agreed that this was a suitable spot to rebuild human civilization.

First, the open grassland allowed them to easily notice approaching threat, be it ambush from the alien or native animals.

Second, there was a supply of fresh water, and the close distance to the sea meant that there would be easy salvage of marine products. The forest nearby also offered fresh meats...

This was the first step of the starting plan, the selection of mankind's new capital!

Chapter 188: Level 2 All-Rounder

"Hey Jerry, did you hear? The defense unit brought a fish-like creature with feet back to the Hope today," a teen yelled as he waved to another teen a distance away.

Jerry was flipping through the documents in his hands. It detailed the freshwater consumption used by Street C that was on the Hope's second floor, since he was second floor Street A, B, C, and D's water and electricity manager. Other than the usual road maintenance, his job entailed him revising the electricity and water consumption on the 1st of every month for the 4 streets before sending them to the Department of Water and Electricity.

When the other teen yelled out his name, he put down the document and said indifferently, "Tom, don't get too excited for nothing. The fish came in a sealed plastic bag, right? They won't even allow the water from outside the Hope come into contact with anything inside the Hope, much less the fish itself."

Tom sidled up to Jerry with a face full of smiles. "I'm just trying to chat with you. Why the long face so early in the morning? Even if you gave the fish for me to eat, I don't think I'd have the guts to eat it anyway. Who knows what will happen after you eat it? Maybe your body will be infested with parasites, or you'll be changed into a mutant fish! How scary would that be? I, for one, will not go near that fish, much less eat it, but you know those chinks..."

Jerry shot him a fiery glance, and Tom coughed as he corrected himself. "Those Chinese people are discussing what kind of tasty

animals would they find on this planet! Oh my god, do their heads not go beyond the matters of food?"

Jerry frowned and he rebuked Tom. "How could you say something like that, Tom? I remember your Chinese neighbors treating your family to a scrumptious meal when you first moved into this residential area. Stop being so judgmental and racist; you're not so good yourself, a ruffian."

Tom kept smiling, unaffected by Jerry's admonishment. "Well, I'm only 18, and there are still 6 more years before the required age for me to find a job. The only thing I need to focus on is my studies. Furthermore, both my parents are in the Academy, so they have impressive benefits and salary. Alas, they spend their whole days researching this and that, so it has to fallen on their son to spend their H-coins, or else wouldn't it be a waste?"

Jerry ignored him and went back to his documents. He jotted down a few notes.

Tom waited for Jerry to pick up the thread of conversation, but when he didn't, Tom continued, "Actually, Jerry, I don't understand why you are out here working at your young age. You're only 3 months older than me, right? Furthermore, your dad is a university lecturer, so there's no need for you to move out so early from home and work to support your own studies. Also, didn't I hear you volunteer to join the military? Moreover, it's the Black Star Troopers regime. Did you seriously not hear about the rumors that all the troopers are to be taken into the Homo Evolutis Faction to be molded into robots? Poor Maria has been crying herself to sleep these few days..."

Jerry sighed and put the documents away. He looked Tom straight in the eye as he said, "Tom, I know you're here because Maria told you to, so I'm going to cut to the chase lest both of our times are wasted. I wish to join the Black Star Troopers not only because I am a Perceptor, but I feel summoned to do so. I've told both you and Maria as much."

Tom dropped his ruffian-esque demeanor and replied in a serious tone, "Yes, you've told us so, but we thought you were kidding. We have not heard God summoning people to join the military before; doesn't the calling usually mean going into the cloister or church? Why the military camp? Did God tell you to be his blessed knight or avenging angel?"

Jerry frowned deeply. After a lengthy consideration, he answered, "You misunderstood me. When I said I was summoned, I didn't mean it in terms of a God's calling, it's more of a compellation. I don't know how to describe it. After I became a Homo Evolutis, I felt compelled to be near Captain Yao Yuan, to fight alongside him. Every time I'm near him, I feel comfortable and safe."

Tom shivered visibly and took a few deliberate steps away from Jerry, saying, "Oh, I didn't know... you bend that way. No wonder you rejected Maria every time... Poor Maria."

Jerry didn't know whether to be mad or laugh. He shook his head and said, "I only bend one way, and that is straight. Truth be told, I quite like Maria, but only as a sister. She's too young, only 14. Furthermore, the desire to be near the Captain has nothing to do

with my sexual orientation, it's something more spiritual... like his presence was some sort of physical talisman."

Tom tried convincing Jerry to change his mind, but it was to no avail. This 18-year-old teen who boarded the Hope when he was 12 had his heart set.

There were about 30 people who shared the same sentiment as Jerry. They appeared after the war with the mother nest ended. All of them were Homo Evolutis, but varied in gender, Homo Evolutis types, and age. There was another similarity between all of them, and that was their reason for applying to join the Black Star Troopers. They wanted to fight alongside Yao Yuan.

The one person who was most shocked by this development was none other than Yao Yuan himself.

Of course, the enlargement of the Black Star Troopers was one of his plans. The troopers had shown its importance in the combat against the mother nest. No matter the early ambush or later space combat, the Black Star Troopers were responsible for turning the battle around. Without the troopers, Yao Yuan dared to say they would have been infiltrated by the alien before they could even have the chance to warp.

The 30 plus troopers who died in the war were thus giant losses for the Hope. Combined with the infected Troopers who didn't hold on until the discovery of the Ultimate Vaccine, the Troopers lost 20 percent of their numbers! They now had about 110 members.

Authorities from the Barracks had been pressuring Yao Yuan to conscript more people into the Black Star Troopers since the end of the war. According to their data, among the new batch of Homo Evolutis, women included, there were about 10 individuals that could be trained to join the Black Star Troopers.

Wary of causing resentment through forced enlistment, Yao Yuan hesitated to sign the order. He had kept the need to refurbish the Black Star Troopers on the backburner for about one and a half months. Needless to say, he didn't expect these people to volunteer to join the troopers. Yao Yuan should've been overjoyed, but when every single one of them mentioned the feeling of being summoned, he became cautious and anxious. To be precise, he was afraid they were all there because they were unconsciously hypnotized by his All-Rounder's power.

This was because the All-Rounder had access to all the Homo Evolutis' powers, just that his power wasn't as powerful as the respective pure variants. The All-Rounder was a rarity among the Homo Evolutis and the other types, with the same rarity was the Deceiver.

The Homo Evolutis Faction had tried everything they could to uncover the mysteries of the Deceiver, but they were impeded by Jay's condition. Therefore, most of the research was theoretical. Some researchers proffered the hypothesis that the Deceiver's power worked in the same way as the Anima. They could communicate with others through an alternative channel. The biggest difference was that the Deceiver could manipulate the information that was communicated. In other words, while the Anima could relay information that he or she was presented with,

the Deceiver could relay whatever he wanted. He could manipulate the information to his advantage in order to deceive his target.

The only power the All-Rounder didn't show obvious signs of having was the Deceiver's. Yao Yuan was afraid he had subconsciously used his Deceiver's power to trick these people into joining the Black Star Troopers. After all, for the past 1 and a half months, the need to increase the Troopers' number was all that he thought about.

Yao Yuan was extremely worried because no matter how strong one was, if the power was uncontrollable, it was more of a burden than benefit. Yao Yuan understood that clearly, so he called Ren Tao, Xiao Niao, and Xi Kong over to discuss this development. He needed specifically Xi Kong to tell him whether she had received any messages or communication from him through the soul web.

Her answer surprised Yao Yuan.

According to Xi Kong, she didn't receive any message from him, much less one with the intention to trick! However, when she submerged into the soul web, she realized that the fireball that represented him had become bigger and brighter. Like a lighthouse in the dark, he was pulling other smaller orbs to him.

After hearing her out, Ren Tao said, "Instead of saying you gained the Deceiver's power, I believed you've become stronger... Do you still remember the messages we gained from the junkyard AI? There is a term that it mentioned, Cosmic Adaptation Index. It had found out a matrix to numerate the Homo Evolutis' power index. Those with a power index more than 500 are Homo Evolutis with

skills, or in other words, Survivors have a power index that is less than 500. All of us Homo Evolutis with skills are deemed as grade S cosmic adapters, and the most unique among all of us, the All-Rounder and Deceiver, are both super grade S cosmic adapters and their power index is about 900. When your power index goes beyond 1,000, according to the AI, you're deemed as...

"A level 2 All-rounder!"

Chapter 189: Governing Policy

Homo Evolutis could be generally separated into two types, Survivors and skilled Homo Evolutis, like Perceptors, Thinkers, and Deceivers.

According to the incomplete record compiled from the junkyard civilization, after a race ventured into space with the intention to migrate to a new home planet, a small populace of that race would evolve to become cosmic adapters.

The simplest adapters would have a better sense of the 3D space. They could instinctually feel out an area's lattice space. This helped tremendously in space combat. Their reaction time became better than usual, and there was a tiny bit of improvement in sensing danger, which allowed them to notice hidden malice. Lastly, their DNA mapping was in some ways restructured, rendering them to receive better results from the genetic mesomeric effect.

More complex adapters had access to everything listed above and a specialized skill. These skills, depending on their type, could be expended to benefit the whole civilization. For example, the Diviner could sense danger approaching his or her group. In the wide cosmos, an early warning could mean life or death for a civilization.

Other examples included the Anima, who could bypass the limitation put forth by the creator's particle. The Seeker could be used as a surveillance replacement when said devices were predisposed. Oftentimes the Seeker could see things that these

devices would miss. Whisperers were invaluable assets to a civilization's survival and prosperity, as they could greatly increase the scientific output of a civilization. They were something of a gem to the civilization.

Among the Homo Evolutis, the most unique were the All-Rounders and Deceivers...

The records of the junkyard civilization stopped with regards to how unique they were. The Academy guessed this was because the civilization didn't have these two Homo Evolutis types, or the records were ruined in combat. Either way, that marked the end of the record. This information was all siphoned into the Homo Evolutis Faction.

Now that Yao Yuan was a Level 2 All-Rounder, he could feel some minute changes, the most conspicuous being the natural and mysterious attraction he exuded for surrounding Homo Evolutis. This was the feeling of being summoned described by the Homo Evolutis who volunteered to join the troopers.

To be honest, Yao Yuan hated this development from the bottom of his heart because the willingness of these people wasn't truly voluntary, they were swayed by some spiritual instinct to be near him. Even though Yao Yuan didn't quite like it, realistically speaking, with the addition of these 30 new troopers, the numbers of the Black Star Troopers would rise back again to 152 people, even a little larger than its initial numbers. After adequate training, the Black Star Troopers would be the Hope's most powerful military regime.

Therefore, despite his personal reluctance, Yao Yuan had to enroll the volunteers into the Black Star Troopers training program. Among the new trainees were 8 female Survivors, which gave Yao Yuan quite a headache. Finally, Yao Yuan decided to accept them as the Black Star Troopers' medical unit.

However, a bigger headache awaited him after that...

"Ol' Yao, I still feel it's not a good idea to compartmentalize the Black Star Troopers. We've seen from the war with the mother nest, a large scale group combat was the trooper's strength," Guang Zhen said as he followed behind Yao Yuan as the two of them walked towards the captain's room. He didn't stop advising Yao Yuan until they reached their destination.

Yao Yuan closed the door with much frustration. He then exchanged a look with Barbie, who was also following them, and she obediently stayed outside of the room. As the door slammed shut, Yao Yuan lectured Guang Zhen. "Ol' Wong, it's not that I want to lecture you, but you're at least the Defense Unit's general. Why were you yammering like an old woman as we walked here?"

Guang Zhen smiled wickedly and said, "Isn't this all your fault? Speaking of the Defense Unit, not only did you not replace the men that I've lost, you've decided to minimize it, leaving me with only 5 battalions, 2,500 soldiers in total. What's up with that? Furthermore, the Black Star Troopers now have 152 members. That is equivalent to 152 human-shaped tanks. It can totally be a specialized armored division, but suddenly you tell me you want to separate it into 10 smaller troops each with 15 members, and they are not under the Defense Unit's jurisdiction. Now how can I help

myself to not hammer some sense into you?"

Yao Yuan didn't reply. Instead he steeped a pot of tea and poured out 2 cups. He passed one to Guang Zhen and held another for himself. Then he finally said, "Ol' Wong, I understand what you're trying to say. You're worried about the recent discussions about the constitution and future human government's governing policy, aren't you? Therefore, you want to bring in the military to have some leverage in the future?"

Guang Zhen almost did a spit take of the tea. He put down the tea cup and looked at Yao Yuan with a complex expression. He sighed and replied, "Ol' Yao, you yourself know how ugly politics can become. If possible, I just want to be a simple soldier... Even though the human government will be under your lead, so it probably won't be so corrupted, the political scene is as fickle as the weather. I'm just looking out for you here. If anything changes in the future, this way at least you'll have the full Black Star Troopers as your support. The politicians would be deterred to have their schemes set on you..."

"But if you break up the troopers, this is giving the politicians the opening they need to undermine you. What if there is an insurgency, or impeachment? Therefore..."

Yao Yuan laughed heartily. He stood up to slap Guang Zhen on his shoulder, adding, "Ol' Wong, your thoughts are still stuck on Earth it seems, and not only that, it's still focused on those days you were embroiled in the Heaven Party's politics... You're right, politics is an always changing the scene, your friend from yesterday could be your enemy today, but there is one detail that

you've missed. Ol' Wong, do you know why I asked Barbie to wait outside? This is because everything I'm going to say next is only allowed within the Black Star Unit. This conversation never happened after we step out of this room, understood?"

Guang Zhen nodded wonderingly. Yao Yuan continued, "First, the new government will be widely different from the ones found on Earth. The biggest difference is, in this case, we're the rule makers, not the rules followers. Do you understand what this means? Realistically speaking, if I'm willing to, I could wrest total control from the existing government. Of course, this might lead to armed resistance, so I won't be doing it, but I could rest easy knowing that the option is always available.

Your worry is not unfounded, because humans are never good at remembering favors. There is a reason why we have Thanksgivings annually, to remind us to be thankful. Humans have a natural tendency to fixate on how they've been wronged but never on how they've been saved. It is impossible to ask the politicians to not undermine our power simply because we've saved humanity. That's your concern, right?"

Guang Zhen nodded immediately, saying, "That is right. Based on how things are going, it is a sure thing that we will have a future government. You'll probably be its first president, or the equivalent, and I'll give it one whole generation to prosper, but what about two or three generations later? With the medical technology, we can live up to 150 to 200 years old, that is 3 or 4 generations already. What if you don't get re-elected? Then, how do we handle the executive and legislative branches that are taken away from our hands? You need to understand that politicians are the most heartless creatures there is. You need to have the Black

Star Troopers as a safety measure; that's why I'm very adamant against breaking up the troopers."

Yao Yuan shook his head and said, with a smile, "If we were still on Earth, this thing may happen, and it would have a high possibility of happening, but you forget that we're no longer on Earth, and this is no longer the 3rd revolution. We're in the 4th industrial revolution!

"The increase in productivity is going to introduce life into the political scene as well. As the rule maker of the new government, do you really think I would give power to the politicians that you mentioned? The 4th revolution is going to improve the overall lifestyle of the general public, so the only way those politicians can stir up resentment towards the government is through an attack on our autocratic nature, and that is why I've decided the new governing policy will be something like this...

"I will set myself up as the chief of state so that I'll have a say until my death. I've secretly taken down the names of those people who have been instigating uproar in the public by releasing statements like 'we will not let the public out of the Hope.' They will not be getting any power. They must think that with the new government, I will need to expand the House of Representatives, but they will be wrong. The new governmental structure will not be the traditional pyramid shape but a circular shape with us at the center. We will have the majority of ruling rights, and the rest will be shared among the general citizens. Other than ourselves, everyone else will be given equal say in the matters of politics.

"It is my hope that with the arrival of the 4th and 5th

revolutions, the public's mind will be following the footsteps as well and evolve into responsible citizens that can think and choose logically for themselves. The public will replace those politicians that you worry about. Of course, this structure still needs a lot of tweaking, but I believe that in the future, with this structure in place, a true democratic society will arise!"

Chapter 190: A Tour

Two months after the war with the mother nest...

The Hope had spent 2 months above ground, flying about until half a month ago when it settled upon the delta plateau to be used as mankind's future capital.

However, because the Ultimate Vaccine that could be used by the public was still in production, the Hope's citizens weren't allowed out of the ship. This didn't mean that nothing was done in the meantime. Within the past 15 days, hundreds of builder robots were sent down to the ground to set up the concrete foundation for future buildings according to the planned blueprint. Viewed from the Hope, the planet began to gain some air of civility.

However, not everyone was satisfied with this development. Other than the exasperation that was pooled from the Confinement Order, they were outraged that the planet's natural bounty was destroyed by the construction... In reality, to decrease effort, the building site was located around flatlands and its marshlands, leaving the forest that was further away completely untouched. However, since mankind had suffered greatly from natural pollution, they were extra sensitive to acts of destruction against nature. Deforestation, animal poaching, and urbanization, they didn't wish to witness these acts anymore...

Even though mankind had gotten used to life in the modern age and basic amenities, like concrete housing and tarred road had become common knowledge, a small group of people still greatly implored the Hope to construct the new capital with as little

destruction to nature as possible. Needless to say, this demand was a bit officious.

Regardless, two months after the war with the mother nest, the citizen's yearning to feel the earth again had reached a critical peak. Even Yao Yuan could feel the palpability of their desire despite the fact that the nature of this planet was not ready to receive them yet.

"Speaker Matt, Professor Peto, and Professor Ivan, let me guess, all three of you come to see me today to talk about descending to the surface, right?" Yao Yuan was in a conversation with Bo Li when Barbie opened the door with an apologetic smile, bringing the trio into the room. Even Yao Yuan stood up to welcome them.

The three were respectively the House of Representatives' speaker, the entomologist who provided her genius insight with regards to the mother nest embryo, and the biology committee's head. They were all respected members of the Hope, so Yao Yuan couldn't just blow them off.

Speaker Matt had the appearance of a middle-aged man in his forties... when in reality, his actual age was already in the 70s. This was also thanks to the genetic mesomeric technology. His initially emaciated body had even begun to bulk up. He was a severe-looking English gentleman who was said to be a duke before he came on to the Hope. He was a well-respected figure among the westerners.

It was him who spoke first. "Captain, we really didn't want to come to disturb you, but you yourself must have already noticed

the mounting desire among the public to leave the Hope. I will not deny that the house that I currently preside over has some bad blood in it, but you can't punish the rest of us due to the few of them."

Yao Yuan laughed politely, then he extended his hand for a handshake with Matt and quickly invited them for a seat. Yao Yuan began, "Of course I understand the public's wish to leave the Hope. It is depressing waking up to the dull, steely interior of the ship when nature is taunting us right outside of our windows. I am extremely sorry about this inconvenience because I know how much every single one of us misses the feel of sunlight on our skin. I know there have been a few representatives trying to stimulate the citizens into a mutiny, but I see this as a lesson to be learned for the government to improve. After all, they won't have any fodder to mount a resistance if they have nothing to complain about. Wouldn't you agree, Speaker Matt?"

Matt's serious expression broke into a smile, adding, "Captain, you're still the same brilliant and kind leader that I admire. To be honest, I've heard about the new governing system the Hope's authority is planning to use when the new government's all set up. I personally would prefer you settle for a constitutional monarchy, like my once beloved country. And, like Queen Elizabeth, I hope you'll take full reign of the country, bringing it towards a more glorious future..."

Ivan, who sat beside him, coughed lightly, and Matt caught himself and chuckled. He patted his head and said, "When you're old, you tend to not stay on tangent anymore. Back to business. We know the Ultimate Vaccine for the general public isn't ready yet, so leaving the Hope is practically a death sentence, but it is a basic

human right to feel and experience nature. We hope the authority will consider allowing small batches of people to tour our future home planet in rotation."

Yao Yuan nodded and opened his mouth to reply, but Matt wasn't done. "Plus, Captain you have to think about... our children."

Yao Yuan frowned and asked, "The children? What about them?"

Matt continued seriously, "Our children, specifically those that joined the ship when they were 7 or 8, have spent the most of their childhood on a spaceship. The sunlight, flowers, grass, and clouds that once characterized their childhood are no longer in their memory. Things are worse for those that were born on the Hope. Captain, I'm begging you as the Speaker for the House of Representatives. Could you allow the kids to go down to the planet with sufficient protection? We shouldn't strip them of what is theirs by right."

Yao Yuan was silenced for a while before he smiled. Then he pulled Bo Li to his side, adding, "Actually, Professor Bo Li and myself were just discussing this. We are working on a design for an anti-gravitational, fully-enclosed tour hovercraft. The craft will have a battery that can last for 48 hours and will be fitted with the best life support system. Should it come into contact with danger, it could fly 5,000 meters into the air.

"The hovercraft should be able to fit 40 people, and the plan is to first manufacture 50 of these tour crafts within the next month. This way, 2,000 people can go on a tour every day. Of course, the

tour will be limited to this plateau and not into the forest. In other words, it must be within 50 meters from the sea. If everyone here agrees with the design, then we should start discussing the details of the selection list."

The three were overjoyed, but the situation quickly devolved into a series of arguments. Matt naturally believed the tour crafts should be carrying the general public with the majority being children. There also needed to be teachers so that the tour would be educational.

Ivan and Peto, though, believed that a section of the crafts should be given to the scientists. At least 5 crafts should be exclusive to biologists, geologists, and other scientists from related fields that needed to conduct sampling and analysis on the planet. The arguments were incessant.

Yao Yuan and Bo Li stood and watched in silence. Bo Li surreptitiously pulled her hand out of Yao Yuan's grasp and a faint blush rose to her face.

Yao Yuan didn't notice Bo Li's action. He stared at the three people arguing before him, and instead of annoyance, he felt gratified and satisfied as it meant that his efforts were not for naught and his struggle to be fair was validated...

After the first tour craft was manufactured, it was tried out by the Black Star Troopers to ensure its safety. Then everyone on the Hope went through every possible channel to find out more about the tours. The common questions were: are the seats purchased through H-coins? Is the seating only available for certain people?

How to get selected?

Everything about the tour craft was the talk of the town.

Yao Yuan thought that this might happen, so details about the seating arrangement and the tours were quickly released on the Hope Weekly.

First, H-coins weren't required because the selection arrangement had its own criteria. It had nothing to do with one's wealth or societal position.

If you were a direct relative to an individual honored with the hero, the warrior, the guardian, or the defender's badge, then you would be given priority according to that order.

After that, if the date of birth on your children's id could show that he or she was born on the Hope, you too could register for the tour, but your priority would be after the previous four noted groups of individuals.

Lastly were the children who ascended the Hope when he or she was less than 10 years old.

Yao Yuan also specifically relegated 3 tour crafts to the Academy, but they were renamed inspection crafts.

Finally, 2 months after the war with the mother nest, the first batch of civilians stepped onto firm ground again. Before their eyes

was a verdant paradise...

At that moment, the eyes of every adult were filled with tears...

Chapter 191: Training

Jerry successfully became a Black Star Trooper. He was now part of the 9th trooper unit.

The unit had a total of 15 members, including himself. 12 of the 15 were newbies. In other words, there were only 3 troopers in his unit that survived the mother nest war. Moreover, according to rumors, only his unit leader, Sub Lieutenant Haweza, was an actual veteran. The other 2 were only slightly more senior than himself.

It was 3 months after the mother nest war. The prominent planet tours had been going on for a month, and it finished carrying about 25,000 people to tour the planet. This was only a small portion of the Hope's total population, and many who had the required criteria still stood waiting for their turn. Those who didn't have the requirement could only satisfy themselves with the pictures and videos brought back by their friends or neighbors. They were so envious that their eyes were tearing up.

However, none of the Black Star Troopers had the time to be envious because they needed to use the 3 months to familiarize themselves with the Ultimate Vaccine.

All of the new troopers were injected with the Ultimate Vaccine and Potion X since they were all Homo Evolutis. This would allow them to safely breathe in the new planet's air and drink its water. However, the benefits came with its own adversities as well. For a long period of time after injecting the Ultimate Vaccine, the new troopers would walk around with bruises all over from constant

tripping. Thankfully, they managed to familiarize themselves with the new sensation within the 3 months.

Early that morning, all 15 members of the 9th unit gathered at the hangar. Wearing his space armor prototype 1 complete with a pair of Gaussian rifle and sawblade, unit leader Haweza frowned at the 14 merry-making soldiers before him. He thought about what Guang Zhen, the defense unit's general and Black Star Trooper's vice general, told him yesterday.

"Sub lieutenant Haweza, with your experience as an ex US marine lieutenant, I believe you have your own opinion on the current state of the Hope's military. It's appalling, I know; any trained military man or woman would say the same.

"In terms of technology and weaponry, we're miles ahead of Earth's old military. In fact, any defense unit battalion could rival Earth's trained armored unit. Alas, combat capability alone doesn't define what makes a good soldier. Without the necessary discipline, self-awareness, willingness to sacrifice for the greater good, and most importantly, the ingrained instinct to follow orders on the battlefield, can we still call them soldiers?

"The defense unit has its own regime to fix all these weaknesses, but it is slightly unique with the Black Star Troopers. You are mankind's ultimate military unit, so there can't be fear or reluctance during danger or combat. You are to make sure that you are as strong as steel! You must be the end to any threat to mankind! You must fight for humanity! You must be feared but mustn't have fear!

Sub Lieutenant Haweza, I want you to train the troopers with the most severe training possible! Ignore the fact that they are valuable Homo Evolutis, because they are only cowards at the moment! Only after real training can they become mankind's protectors. So ignore their cries of fatigue and distress and whip them into shape! Don't hold back and train them to become fearless fighters!"

Haweza remembered distinctly what happened during the combat with the mother nest's monsters. There were not only deserters from the Defense Unit, there were Black Star Troopers that were afraid to get into the heat of the battle. When he stood behind Guang Zhen as the man executed the scared soldier, all that went through his mind wasn't Guang Zhen's ruthlessness but his family back in the Hope, his wife and son. If they fell, his family was going to become nutrients for the alien... He was not going to let that happen!

Therefore, he had to fight. He hated and despised those that didn't!

Guang Zhen was right, cowards should die from shame!

Haweza calmed himself and ordered loudly, "Listen up, kids, there will be no theoretical lesson, no shooting range or physical training... Today, we, the 9th unit, shall start our field training!"

The 14 people were mentally ready because about half a month ago, units 1, 2, and 3 had started their field training. Of course, those 3 units had more veterans in them. In fact, most of the members were from the Black Star Unit itself. They had no

newbies, and the newest member for them had survived the mother nest war, so instead of calling it field training, for the first 3 units, it was more of a body warming.

Actual training started with the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th units. They descended from the Hope to the new planet. They needed to hunt the planet's animals. Surviving on the planet's water, fruits, and plants, that was the gist of field training. The news of their training had the members from units 9 and 10 excited, and today it was finally their turn.

Haweza looked at his team with a steely gaze. After a while, he continued, "This is survival training, so rookies, don't try to emulate what you saw on the actual Black Star Troopers' combat video; you're still too fresh. Don't say I didn't warn you that this training might be fatal. There are some native species on this planet that are especially strong. The first, second, and third units' training was to eliminate them, to prevent them from posing a threat to the human capital in the future. Our training objective was to eliminate creatures that were one tier lower than theirs!"

Suddenly, a teen asked, "Sub Lieutenant, but no matter how strong they are, they won't be stronger than the alien monsters, right?"

Haweza chuckled grimly, adding, "You're wrong! Half a month ago, our scouting unit found a bunch of monster carcasses. They deduced that about 300 monsters had perished there, including the 3-meter-long sawblade-inspired super close-quarter monster type that was the stuff of nightmares. There were bite marks all over the bodies. Later they found out that this carnage was done by a

group of 6 native creatures. Thankfully, there are few of them left, or they would be a bigger threat than the alien monsters!"

All 14 troopers were shocked into silence. However, their expressions were that of disbelief, thinking Haweza was toying with them.

Regardless, 10 minutes later, the transport shuttle for this unit finished preparing. Everyone put on their assigned gear and descended from the Hope to the surface of their new home planet.

Their landing spot was the delta plain, specifically a spot that toed the forest beyond. All 15 troopers stepped out of the shuttle, taking in the view through their helmets.

Haweza spoke into the communicator, "You return to the ship first. I believe we'll not be needing your service in the coming week."

"... Alright, all the best to you, Sub Lieutenant. You can reach me through the Hope if there's an emergency."

The shuttle lifted off into the air, leaving behind the 15 Black Star Troopers.

Haweza wasted no time to admire the scenery. He removed his helmet and took a in a deep breath. The remaining 14 troopers tossed him a surprised look.

"Kids, what are you staring at? Remove your helmets, the Ultimate Vaccine enables you to breath in this planet's air directly, or do you prefer to enjoy the planet through a sheet of glass like the touring civilians? Be men!" Haweza said with a guffaw.

The rest hesitated slightly before removing their helmets. They sucked in the air quickly. The air was moist, mixed with a bouquet of aromas. A mixture of earthiness and dewy freshness. It was a smell that wasn't present on the Hope, a distinct difference to the sterilized air 'created' by the system.

As the 14 troopers took in the air with their eyes closed, Haweza squatted down to find a sliver of purple grass among a bush of weeds. He pulled it up and a pink-colored bulb hung among its roots. He patted the dirt away and threw it into his mouth. He then chewed on it with a satisfied smile.

"Kids, this is going to be our new planet. Treasures are hidden everywhere. The grass that I just pulled is very common on this planet, and its roots grow a bulbous petiole. Analysis showed that it is a good source of carbohydrates and filled with multiple vitamins. It could very well be our staple food in the future."

Haweza straightened himself and looked around emotionally. Then he narrowed them at his unit. "Listen up, kids! The Black Star Troopers are mankind's most powerful and important military unit, and our existence is to protect humanity's safety! To do that, we must be fearless, strong, and tenacious!

"Therefore, forget everything about your previous comfortable lifestyle! From today onwards, we will commit to a weeklong

survival training and locate plus eliminate the creatures that pose danger to humanity! The Black Star Troopers don't need cowards! I've been given the right to execute anyone that refuses orders during training and combat. His family will be informed that he is a despicable deserter and that he has died from shame!

And now we depart because training has begun!"

Chapter 192: Feng Xiao Chen

10 AM...

Xiao Chen yawned and rubbed her blurry eyes. She then walked into the bathroom with her tussled hair. After a quick bathroom routine, she reappeared as a cute girl, looking about 17 in age. She had on a simple garter dress, showing off her youth.

In reality, Xiao Chen was already 22, but the mesomeric technology had doubled mankind's life expectancy. In other words, Xiao Chen could maintain her youthful appearance for another 10 years. This was a feature well-loved by the women of the Hope, and they hadn't stopped using the technology ever since it was introduced.

Xiao Chen pulled open the door to her fridge and extricated from within a pitcher of milk, cake, and fresh fruits, like strawberries. However, she didn't take a bite out of any of them. She set them up nicely and walked into a room. 15 minutes later, a blushing Xiao Chen wheeled Jay out. The man had a pale complexion and looked like he was asleep. He was strapped into the chair with belts, and a drip hung at his side.

"Good morning... It's time for breakfast, Big Liar. Today's breakfast is milk and cake. I baked it myself. See, I burned my fingers baking it; look at the ugly bandage."

Xiao Chen moved the cake closer to the sleeping man and waved her bandaged index finger in front of his face. Jay gave no visible

response, not even a flutter of his lashes.

Xiao Chen, though, seemed to have gotten used to this kind of one-sided interaction. She giggled to herself and started to have her breakfast. After she cleared everything away, she moved behind Jay and said, "It's time for our daily walk. You lucky fella, you have a gorgeous girl willing to accompany you on your walks, a girl you've cheated at that. You should definitely feel honored."

Xiao Chen pushed Jay out of their crowded room. After passing a few blocks, they stopped at a small pavilion. Xiao Chen sat down on an empty bench. The passing crowd examined the unusual couple, many tossing them respectful and admiring looks.

After the incident on the meteorite base, Jay had gone into a coma from over-exhausting his Deceiver's power. His condition had gotten better after the past few years. Before the 4th revolution, Jay had to be plugged into the life support system to keep him alive, but with the improvement in medical technology and surgery, he only needed a daily glucose drip to prevent his body from dying.

Ever since then, Xiao Chen had been taking care of Jay. Yao Yuan offered her a special job, to be responsible for constant care of mankind's hero. He allowed her all the benefits she needed to survive without an actual job. This way she could focus on caring for Jay. Other than that, a medical crew visited Jay at Xiao Chen's residence every week to conduct the necessary examinations. This policy had lasted until now.

To his surprise, the fiery Xiao Chen agreed with all his

arrangements. She cloistered herself in her own home to take full care of Jay. She would talk to him and clean his body every day. Basically, except the obvious, she did all the work like she was his wife.

It had been 3 months since the war with the mother nest, and about 25,000 people had visited the new home planet. Needless to say, Xiao Chen desired to join them. She wanted to see and touch nature for herself. Her girlish nature compelled her to do so. However, she could only satisfy herself with clippings of animals and plants pictures published in the Hope Weekly. She could approach Yao Yuan for special permission to join the tour, and he would agree, but... she couldn't leave Jay behind.

Sitting at the pavilion, Xiao Chen sighed. She used her fingers to tidy up Jay's hair that was windblown. As she fussed over him, she said, "Big Liar, could you please wake up? I want you to take my hand and we'll race across this new planet like how we did when we were on Planet Sahara."

Her words fell on deaf ears. She leaned back in her chair and the two of them spent the rest of the morning sitting quietly by each other's side. When Xiao Chen was ready to push Jay back home, an electromobile stopped by the pavilion and down strode a young man in army fatigue.

"Xiao Chen, I knew you would be here... Still nothing from Jay?" The young man walked towards Xiao Chen and Jay once he descended.

Xiao Chen was familiar with this young man. He was Jay's

comrade and close friend, Zhang Heng. Even though Jay had become comatose, the Hope didn't forget about him. Not only did its citizens still remember him as a hero, members of the Black Star Unit came to visit him often. Even the busy Yao Yuan came over once a week. Zhang Heng visited them pretty much whenever he was free. He would bring over fresh fruits for Xiao Chen sometimes, causing his friends, Mao Miao and Ning Xue, to suspect he had found himself a girlfriend.

Xiao Chen smiled politely, saying, "Zhang Heng, you're here to visit Jay again? He's still the same old, same old. The doctor told me to keep on conversing with him. One day, he'll reply."

Zhang Heng sat down beside her and Xiao Chen could sense the atmosphere getting solemn. Finally he said, "Xiao Chen, I'm here today to take Jay away..."

Xiao Chen's expression dropped immediately. She forced a smile and said, "Zhang Heng, what happened? Did the Captain have other orders? Or what I did wasn't good enough?"

Zhang Heng waved his hands hurriedly. "No, it's not that. Actually, I need to bring him to get the Ultimate Vaccine and Potion X injection. You should've seen the reports on the papers; every Homo Evolutis needs the injection. It allows them to breathe in the new planet's air directly."

Xiao Chen's expression relaxed slightly, and she asked worriedly, "But he's still in a coma. Can his body survive such an injection? Plus, he can't join the Troopers in his condition; what would be the use of the injection? Plus, you said you have to take him away..."

Zhang Heng was silent before saying, "Because some experts believe that for a half brain-dead patient like Jay, he needs a certain degree of stimulation before he can regain consciousness. Of course we won't expose him to any danger, but honestly, we have a good source of stimulation at the ready, which is to allow him contact with nature, actual grass, flowers, sunlight, air, and maybe even seawater. I agree it might not work, but it's still better than letting him waste away inside the Hope. Therefore, the Captain ordered to have him injected with the vaccine cocktail and then move him into a small room built down there. Ebon and myself are tasked with looking after him."

Xiao Chen got paler as their conversation continued. She lowered her head and asked softly, "Can I... get the vaccine injection too?"

Zhang Heng was surprised by her request. He scratched his head and replied, "I don't think so. Component X is something naturally produced by the Homo Evolutis. We've tried using it on animals before, and every single one of them has died. Therefore, Yao Yuan has a strict ban against using the potion on normal civilians. Xiao Chen... you are not a Homo Evolutis, are you?"

Xiao Chen could feel tears pricking her eyes. She suppressed her mounting urge to cry. Without lifting her head, she asked, "No, I'm just a normal citizen... Then, can I go visit him?"

Zhang Heng too felt pressured by the atmosphere, so he said in distress, "I don't think that's possible either. Normal civilians aren't allowed to go into the new planet unless it's in the tour craft. You can visit Jay, but your visitation will be through the

glass... Are you okay with that? How about this, Xiao Chen, if you're really not up for it, I will help you persuade the Captain to rescind the order. He's a sentimental person, so I'm sure he wouldn't reject your request."

Xiao Chen deliberated for a long time and finally replied with a fierce determination in her eyes. "No, Zhang Heng, take him away. It's okay, I'm only taking care of him because he saved my life, after all... No, really, it's fine, take him, I'm glad to be rid of such a burden."

As she said so, tears rolled down her face. Like pearls, they fell on her hand that grabbed Jay's firmly, shattering upon contact.

Zhang Heng looked at her and sighed. "How about this: I'll ask the Captain to allocate a permanent craft seat specifically for you. Jay will be moved to the ground tomorrow. With this seat, you can see him whenever you want. Give me a heads-up beforehand and I'll bring you to meet him." Zhang Heng let out another deep sigh before wheeling Jay towards the electromobile.

Xiao Chen wiped away the tears that kept on falling, mumbling, "Who... who wants to see him? Damn the liar... he's already in a coma and still manages to make me cry..."

Neither Zhang Heng nor Xiao Chen noticed...

At that moment, Jay's finger twitched slightly.

Chapter 193: Love that is Blocked by Glass

Jay was successfully injected with the Ultimate Vaccine. In a twist of fate, the typical side-effects were nullified because he was in a coma. The day after that, Zhang Heng and Ebon brought his body out of the Hope. Their destination was a wooden cabin set up next to the capital building site. It was sandwiched between a grass plain and a riverside fishing hole. The cabin was big enough to fit Zhang Heng, Ebon, and Jay.

Yao Yuan had his own idea behind this arrangement.

First, the obvious gain aside, Jay was his comrade, and they had been in plenty of life-or-death situations before. Yao Yuan had already treated him as part of the Black Star Unit. Furthermore, Jay ended up this way due to a selfless action, so Yao Yuan really wanted him to wake up.

Practically speaking, Jay was one of the most unique Homo Evolutis alongside the All-Rounder. Yao Yuan needed more information on the Deceiver's power, and that could only be done with Jay's conscious cooperation.

For example, Yao Yuan had gained much knowledge about the All-Rounder. He was the center of all Homo Evolutis, a spiritual existence that could gather the confidence and faith of other Homo Evolutis. In other words, the possibility of betrayal among the Homo Evolutis would be greatly lowered with his presence. This was a great burden on Yao Yuan's back because to have the powerful Homo Evolutis revolt would be a serious blunder. That was why Yao Yuan was reluctant to let Guang Zhen force-enlist the

new batch of Homo Evolutis into the military.

He wanted to know more about the Deceiver that was deemed to be equally unique as the All-Rounder. Wherein lays the uniqueness?

Therefore, Yao Yuan decided to move Jay to the planet's surface and had Ebon and Zhang Heng protect him. The choice of Ebon was self-explanatory; he was the strongest among all the Perceptors, and his close-quarter combat capability could easily rival Yao Yuan's.

Zhang Heng, on the other hand, was the strongest Diviner. His power thus far had been 100 percent correct, responsible for saving mankind from certain death multiple times. With him by Jay's side, Yao Yuan was relieved. The orders he gave were simple. If there was any sense of danger, Zhang Heng would be tasked to protect Jay and bring him back to the Hope while Ebon stayed behind to cover their retreat.

It was a failsafe recovery plan...

The one detail that bothered Yao Yuan was Feng Xiao Chen, who was mentioned by Zhang Heng when he returned from claiming Jay's body. The lovesick woman had been taking care of Jay for multiple years. Because of her beauty, she had attracted the attention of several bachelors over the years, but she firmly rejected them all. She wanted to focus completely on looking after Jay. And Zhang Heng said that when they left... she cried.

Yao Yuan's hands were tied. He really wanted to help Xiao Chen, but alas, she wasn't a Homo Evolutis, so the Ultimate Vaccine in its current form would kill her, and they still needed at least 3 months to perfect the vaccine suitable for the public. Yao Yuan steeled his heart and approved of the mission.

When they reached the surface, Ebon and Zhang Heng first spread out to search the perimeters following the Black Star Unit's usual protocol. They sighed in relief when they made certain there were no wild animals hiding around the corner. Then they started setting up the place, Jay's and their own bedrooms, the weapons rack, and the like.

In reality, both were rather laid back because this mission was quite a relaxed one. Compared to the mission undertaken by the Black Star Troopers, taking care of Jay was a cakewalk. The area they were in was defined by the experts as a light-green area, or a space where the scale of danger was incredibly low. The chance of encountering life-threatening danger was low. When the capital was complete, the area would become a dark-green area, which meant that it was totally safe. Humans could travel around the area without any fear for their safety.

Then again, with Zhang Heng's presence, the place was practically a dark-green area. Hence, this mission was a rare holiday for the both of them.

After everything was set up, Ebon chuckled slyly as he retrieved from his backpack several fishing rods. He said, "How about it, Zhang Heng, want to go fishing? The few things here can be considered antiques since they were taken from Earth. They have

not seen use for several years; didn't think I'd be able to use them again in this life."

Zhang Heng was slightly startled before saying excitedly, "Why not? I was deliberating whether we should have canned roasted potatoes with beef or canned pork for dinner. Fresh fish sounds a lot better. The fish from this planet have been analyzed by the Academy to be virus-free, right? There's nothing in its meat that would be harmful to human consumption, and they said its meat was full of vitamins and nutrients. With the vaccine injected, it's beneficial to our bodies to consume the fish on this planet, and I've always wondered what one tastes like."

Ebon's face scrunched up and he shook his head real fast, adding, "You mean the one that has legs? They look so weird. Other than the eyes on their head, they have another pair on their belly; it's so creepy."

Zhang Heng shrugged it off. He took Ebon's fishing rods, and with Ebon pushing Jay, the three of them headed towards the riverside.

The new home planet was truly a natural paradise. It was a planet completely untouched by human pollution. It was filled with biodiversity, there were reptiles that reminded them of dinosaurs, giant mammals hiding in the forest, amphibians that were 10 meters long but had the look of a common frog. The evolution on this planet was completely different from that of Earth's, but nature was beautiful in all of its forms.

Simultaneously, there were different species of aquatic creatures.

Other than the obvious feet-like appendages, the fish on this planet had similar looks to the ones on Earth. With their "legs," they were able to survive on dry land for a certain period of time. They would crawl out of the water to munch on river weeds or move to another habitat.

With this evolution as evidence, some scientists believed that this planet had a serious tidal phenomenon. The fish had to evolve to survive on land because certain places would completely dry up when the tide ebbed. This was valid from a meteorological perspective. Since the planet and Moon 2 were so close in size, it was entirely possible that the gravitational pull between the two could dry certain rivers or lakes up during certain months. The month they arrived happened to be spring season, where the tide was high that so fish with legs were understandably a weird sight...

Of course, Zhang Heng and Ebon didn't know nor did they care about such details. They started fishing by the riverside. It was possible because the fish on this planet hadn't seen a fishing hook before, so they were easily drawn to their bait. In just 10 minutes, between the two of them, they had pulled in about 100 fish of varying sizes. If calculated in kilograms, both of them had a combined haul of about 120 kilograms in just one hour. However, due to the fragility of their fishing rods and their inland location, they didn't catch any big fish. Regardless, that didn't take away from the fun that they had.

Suddenly, their communicator rang. Ebon turned serious, dropped his rod, and said, "This is the Black Star Troopers' Lieutenant Ebon."

The reply came, "Lieutenant Ebon, this is Cadet Qiu Si Te from the tour craft. We have Feng Xiao Chen onboard with us. With the Captain's permission, she wants to see Jay."

Ebon was at a loss. Before he could reply, Zhang Heng snatched his communicator and said, "This is Lieutenant Zhang Heng, affirmative on that order. Please bring her to the resting bay. We're fishing by the riverside. If you spot us, please drive the craft down our direction."

A few minutes later, a mid-sized craft floated down towards them from upstream. There were about 10 people looking at them through the craft's glass dome. Most of them were children interspersed with a few guardians. As the craft neared, Zhang Heng and Ebon stood up from the position and wheeled Jay further into the flat plains. When the craft halted, they saw Xiao Chen pushed up to the glass doom, her eyes scanning searchingly their way.

Zhang Heng mumbled a few words at Ebon before pushing Jay closer to the craft. Because the craft's elevation wasn't high, when Xiao Chen lowered her head, she could peer into Jay's sleeping face. Almost instantly, her tears started falling.

She stuck her hands to the glass and opened her mouth to say something, but she realized that the craft was completely segregated from the outside world. Other than through the communicator, there was no way her voice was going out of the craft. Helplessness made her cry even harder.

Zhang Heng sighed and grasped Jay's hand to align it to Xiao

Chen's hands that were on the glass. Even though they were separated by the thick pane of glass, this reminded Xiao Chen of the walks they used to take together hand-in-hand.

"Jay Wales... You big liar, please wake up, I want to hear you call my name. I don't want to be alone anymore; I want to be a Homo Evolutis, because I want to be beside you..."

Xiao Chen kept on crying, and gradually, she felt her consciousness giving. Finally, she collapsed to the floor...

Everyone stared at her with worry, and the medical unit stationed inside the craft rushed to her side. Zhang Heng and Ebon, who were outside the craft, yelled into the communicator, asking for updates. With all the commotion, no one noticed that Jay's eyebrow had moved several times...

Chapter 194: The Deceiver!

Xiao Chen came down with a high fever...

After her visit with Jay through the tour craft, she fell into an unconscious fever.

Initially, many people thought her faint spell was because of her heartbreak from her inability to continue staying with Jay. Even Yao Yuan was under that impression. He only ordered the medical crew to look after her and bring her to the captain's room when she woke up. He didn't have any other orders.

But the later development shocked everyone. Xiao Chen's body temperature continued to rise, and she had been unconscious for one whole day and night. The medical crew gave her all sorts of fever medicine, including the latest trial supermagnetic procedures, but her condition wouldn't improve.

The next day, the medical crew started to worry because they knew Xiao Chen was a person of special importance. Her connection to Jay aside, the fact that Captain Yao Yuan had personally inquired about her condition told them that Xiao Chen must be kept alive. After a rushed discussion with the Academy, they came to a conclusion...

Xiao Chen was evolving into a Homo Evolutis!

This came as no surprise to Yao Yuan. He realized her symptoms were way too similar to the mysterious fever. Thus far, many

medical workers still believed that the fever was caused by the currently unidentified Virus X. There was no need to quarantine Xiao Chen because if the virus was contagious, many young people wished desperately to contract it. A fever to trade for the possibility of superpowers? Yes, please. A chance to walk on the new planet was an added bonus as well.

It's just that... Why did Xiao Chen choose such a time to evolve into a Homo Evolutis?

Her timing was simply too weird. There had been two awakenings of Homo Evolutis thus far. The first was when they first left Earth, about 100 people evolved into Homo Evolutis. A sad fact was that about 80 percent of the fever patients perished due to mankind's backwards state of medical technology at the time. This was a point of regret for those who were in the know later, because who knew how many All-Rounders, Deceivers, or some other new type of Homo Evolutis could be among those that had died?

The second awakening occurred moments after they were warped into this planet.

For both awakenings, the scales were massive. At least 100 people had fallen ill. According to the research by the Homo Evolutis Faction, this meant that the awakening could be tied to life-preserving planets. For example, the first mass awakening happened when the Hope left Earth, a life-preserving planet. The second was when the Hope warped into this new home planet, another life-preserving planet. It was also worth noting that both awakenings happened around the time of warping.

Xiao Chen's case was an anomaly. Why did it happen half a year after the latest warp, and why did it only affect her alone?

It was begging to be studied.

Until now, the Homo Evolutis Faction's research hadn't really reached a breakthrough. Research topics, like awakening triggers, in-depth research of Homo Evolutis powers, side effects from overexertion of power, and training regimes to enhance the powers, all hit a wall. Among all of these, the most important was definitely the Homo Evolutis awakening trigger. If they discovered the trigger, it was entirely possible to transform the entirety of mankind into Homo Evolutis! Mankind would be a perfect race. How impactful that would be for mankind's future!?

But that was impossible because even the more advanced junkyard civilization hadn't accomplished it.

But Xiao Chen's awakening might prove to be a crucial anomaly that could lead to a breakthrough. Why was the timing of her awakening so different? Why weren't there the usual symptoms before her awakening? Why was only she alone affected?

And most importantly, could her situation be duplicated on other people?

Regardless, Xiao Chen's itinerary for 1 week prior to her awakening was brought up for discussion. Her more personal activities aside, the basic timeline was as follows: separation from Jay, visitation of Jay on the new planet, and then Homo Evolutis

awakening.

From this, the expert tried to extrapolate the possible awakening triggers.

The first was a great fluctuation of emotions, but the possibility of this was low. There was a series of stirring events affecting mankind ever since they escaped into space, and this was also common when they were back on Earth, so why hadn't they heard of the presence of Homo Evolutis then?

Of course, it was possible that it had to be coupled with the element of space-warping. Then again, there were at least ten thousand people on the Hope that experienced space-warping, and there wasn't a lack of people being stirred by emotions among them, so why hadn't there been more Homo Evolutis?

The second was the pain of separation. This had a higher possibility. After all, the first awakening could be caused by the pain of separating from Earth. The intensity for pain of separation for Xiao Chen could be similar to that.

However, the refutation was that there were many others whose friends and families died on the battlefield that survived. Wasn't their pain equally intense? So why hadn't they undergone the evolution? Why was Xiao Chen's case so unique?

This possibility was thus rejected.

The third possibility was the one offered by Ren Tao and Xiao Niao after they were briefed on the issue... it had to do with Jay.

This hypothesis was hard to understand, so Yao Yuan called over the both of them to come explain it to him.

Ren Tao scratched behind his ears and said with a shrug, "Because that's the last possibility. After you've ruled out the other 2 possibilities, this is the one you're left with. The last awakening wasn't so long ago, so why didn't she fall victim to the fever then?"

Xiao Niao nodded his head and picked up Ren Tao's argument. "That's because her situation is unique. Xiao Chen has experienced the same thing as everyone else, the space-warp, the giant sway in emotions, discovery of a life-preserving planet; she was there to experience them all. But she didn't contract the fever alongside the two mass awakenings; her awakening is uniquely isolated. That's why instead of looking at the big picture, we should focus on what's different in her situation. After you remove all the rejected possibilities, the remaining one, no matter how ludicrous it is, is the truth."

The three of them were at the Homo Evolutis Faction. Quarantined within was Xiao Chen, and outside of it were Yao Yuan, Ren Tao, Xiao Niao, and other scientists. Yao Yuan too entered his Thinker's state as he deliberated Ren Tao and Xiao Niao's arguments. He added, "I see what the both of you are getting at... Jay, indeed, is the key to the Xiao Chen's awakening. He's the only possible hypothesis left. In fact, video from inside the tour craft did reveal Xiao Chen saying she wanted to be a Homo Evolutis

to be beside Jay."

Ren Tao and Xiao Niao snuck a look at one another. There was surprise and confirmation reflected in their eyes. Ren Tao asked immediately, "This proves the validity of our next, bigger hypothesis... Yao Yuan, do you remember our discussion about why the Deceiver was at the same level as the All-Rounder with a super S grade?"

Yao Yuan reared his head in shock and nodded. "I do, but the discussion, as I remember, had no conclusion..."

Xiao Niao interjected, "That was because we had nothing else to go on. We had no materials to pinpoint the Deceiver's functionality, other than it being a more powerful Anima... Before that, Yao Yuan, I want to ask you something. Can you still remember the sensation you felt during the fever that made you a Homo Evolutis?"

Yao Yuan nodded after some thoughts, saying, "I felt dropped into the wide cosmos. I realized then how small life really is against the background of the wide cosmos. I fully understood the meaning of 'life's a brief candle.' It was incredibly lonely and helpless, and after that, I woke up."

Ren Tao confirmed, "It was the same for me and my sister, Chou Yue. Everything you just described we experienced as well... So we came up with a wild thought. What if the Deceiver could trick other people into this particular sensation? Yao Yuan, what do you think would entail?"

Yao Yuan's expression changed. He stood up and paced around the room. "Then it is entirely possible that the Deceiver could induce the awakening in other normal human beings, but this is just a hypothesis, a very crazy one at that. Our current research on Homo Evolutis is still too surface-level; who could really tell if this is or isn't the trigger? Then again, everyone in space must have felt the same sensation of loneliness and helplessness before, so why haven't these people been affected by the evolution?"

Xiao Niao waved his hands dismissively, adding, "Who knows? Maybe the intensity wasn't enough, or their minds have already gotten used to life in space, or they are somehow suppressed by society? Regardless, we aren't sure about this hypothesis either, but at least one thing's certain: Xiao Chen's awakening is deeply linked to Jay. And if this relationship could affirm our other more fantastical hypothesis, then the reason why the Deceiver is on the same level as the All-Rounder as super S grade cosmic adapter is because...

"He can create an entire civilization of Homo Evolutis!"

Chapter 195: Homo Evolutis and the Survival Training

Xiao Chen woke up after several days of unconsciousness. She was confirmed to be the rare Anima after being checked at the Homo Evolutis Faction.

Needless to say, the researchers were still clueless about why Xiao Chen suddenly became a Homo Evolutis, and not only a Survivor with no skills, but an Anima. It was mind boggling.

From conversing with Xiao Chen, she too had no idea why it happened. But due to its importance, the conversation was recorded and kept in the Homo Evolutis Faction's files.

"... It was a boundless cosmos, a pitch black environment. There were twinkling stars, but all of them were so far away that their shine was constantly eclipsed by the cosmos' total darkness.

"The pervading feeling was one of fear. The fear of being lost in space, the fear of being left to fend for myself alone. I yearned for a companion, someone to assure me of my existence..."

Thus far, everything was similar to the experience of others' awakening, but what happened next was the kicker.

"Right then, I heard Jay's voice relaying his experience to me when he himself became a Homo Evolutis. He walked me through it. His voice told me that it depended solely on myself whether I

could become a Homo Evolutis. He said that as long as the purity of my desire to communicate with others, to find a home among like-minded people, didn't disappear, then I will become a Homo Evolutis."

This part of her conversation became a crucial clue to uncovering the mystery of Homo Evolutis awakening. Also, it helped confirm Ren Tao's, Yao Yuan's, and Xiao Niao's speculation. Xiao Chen's awakening had everything to do with Jay. However, the nature of that relationship was still an unknown. Was Xiao Chen already on her way to become a Homo Evolutis and Jay had only pushed her along? Or did Jay forcefully make her into one?

Regardless, this was an important manifestation of the Deceiver's uniqueness.

A power that could awaken someone into Homo Evolutis, a dreamlike power if there ever was one. The three felt like the All-Rounder might not have access to the Deceiver's power, or else it would have manifested itself in some way by now, and it would definitely be the best power in the All-Rounder's arsenal!

Yao Yuan, on his part, was not envious or threatened by this information. Even though he was an All-Rounder, more importantly, he was the captain for all of humanity. He appreciated all sources of power that were beneficial to the livelihood of humanity, as long as the owner wasn't someone malicious. Yao Yuan believed that he had a good eye for people, and he believed Jay was a good and kind individual, not one to lust for power. Therefore, he was overjoyed when they found out about this new aspect of the Deceiver.

"It is as we suspect; the power level of a Homo Evolutis is not dependent on its overall numbers but its user's mastery over it. Before this, we had no idea the Deceiver could use his power in this manner, but with a real life case before us, we realized that the power could be used in this way as well." Xiao Niao sighed, shaking his head.

Ren Tao added, "But I believe not every Deceiver will have access to this power; maybe it's limited by a threshold of some sort, like the Deceiver's physical condition, or perhaps it has to do with the person that is being awakened. Like whether the person's body condition can suffer through the awakening process. However, with the advancement in our medical technology, I believe one day even our seniors can awaken into Homo Evolutis safely. Then again, I still have my suspicions that the awakening has more to do with one's spiritual integrity. But the reality doesn't seem to support it, because most of the Homo Evolutis aren't overtly religious. Maybe the link between the awakening and spirituality is more tenuous than I give it credit for?"

Yao Yuan observed Xiao Chen, who was undergoing a series of tests, and sighed. "We still know too little about the Homo Evolutis. But no matter what, this is a good development, yes? Xiao Chen became an Anima, and Jay finally showed some response. At least now we know he's no longer brain dead. I think with Xiao Chen at his side, he'll wake up soon enough."

After Xiao Chen completed the series of tests, confirming her existence as an Anima, she requested Yao Yuan for an injection of the Ultimate Vaccine. Naturally, her request was immediately approved. She was given the injection on that day itself. What

followed should be a month-long recovery period, but Xiao Chen's stubborn and rash nature compelled her to go searching for Yao Yuan. She begged him to let her see Jay.

Yao Yuan felt that there were only good benefits for her to stay with Jay, since it would aid in helping him wake up, so he agreed. Plus, the location was just below the Hope and it was guarded by Zhang Heng and Ebon.

Just like that, the girl walked to the wooden cabin with stumbling steps. Finally, she saw Jay's sleeping face again. But what happened next made Zhang Heng and Ebon, who were watching, look at each other with bewilderment.

She strode up to Jay's bedside and slapped him heavily on his forehead. A blush rose to her face and she stalked back to her assigned room with faltering steps. The touching reunion that Ebon and Zhang Heng were expecting did not occur.

"You liar, who gave you permission to kiss me in my dreams?" Xiao Chen mumbled in her heart, but her mouth involuntarily curved up into a smile.

All in all, Xiao Chen finally returned to Jay's side and settled into her new lifestyle. It was akin to a life in paradise. Beside the cabin was an unpolluted, bubbling brook with drinkable water that was so clean it was as if it had been sweetened with honey. The other end of the cabin was a grass plain hidden with nature's bounty, and most importantly, the cabin itself was wired with the latest electronic equipment. Life was like a sweet dream...

On the other end, life was like a nightmare for the training troopers of the ninth unit.

This was the sixth day of the training, but for them, it felt more like a year.

Initially, everything was exciting, fresh, and new. Their spirits were high after taking in the planet's air, drinking the sweet-tasting river water, and munching on the safety-approved nuts and fruits.

However, in just a day, the excitement changed into torture. This was because they had brought nothing with them when they ventured into the forest. Other than space armor, Gaussian rifles, and sawblades, they didn't have sleeping bags, rations, freshwater, or even lighters. It was as if time had reverted to the prehistoric age and they only carried some weapons and armor from the 4th revolution. And their order was to survive 1 whole week in such conditions in the jungle!

The jungle naturally provided them with a wealth of fruits, but unfortunately, the Ultimate Vaccine wasn't foolproof. Other than the few fruits examined and confirmed to be safe by the Academy, they were afraid the rest would be poison. Even though they saw the planet's critters munching on them, they were hesitant to consume the fruits, because the critters might have developed an immune system that they didn't have.

Thankfully, most of the animal meats were edible. According the

Academy, the planet's life forms were also carbon-based, so most of them were edible by human standards. Of course, there might be creatures that developed poison as a defense mechanism, like the puffer fish, so before eating some unknown species, one had to pray that it wouldn't be one's last supper.

For the last 6 days, team leader Haweza was the backbone that held the unit together. He was a veteran soldier and thus knew the importance of pre-mission preparation. He researched the jungle's geological structure and unique locations beforehand. Other than that, he also went through the codex of the plants and animals in the jungle that had been researched by the Academy. He jotted down their edibility and effects.

This forest fringing the grass plains had similarities to a prehistoric rainforest. It had high vegetation coverage, and in some deeper areas of the forest, the foliage was so thick that one couldn't see their hands in front of them. The slippery moss that covered the floor became a real hazard. After the ninth unit entered the forest, the first thing they needed to learn was how to survive, the second was how to follow orders and discipline.

According to how perfectly they completed their assigned tasks, the troopers were given rations of differing portions by Haweza. Of course, cooking them was another challenge. The inside of the rainforest was incredibly wet and moist, so it would be hard to light a fire even if they had a lighter. Therefore, they had to learn from Haweza how to steel their stomachs to support eating fresh meat, and the identification of the softest part of the meat...

In other words, the exciting new planet discovery trip that had

the troopers excited from the second day onwards became a real nightmare...

But this journey was just beginning.

Chapter 196: The Training

"Pa!"

Jerry slapped himself. The jolt woke him up.

Of course, he wasn't a masochist; he had a bug as big as two palms sucking his blood on his face. The slap crushed it into a mess of guts, and blood splattered all over his face.

The jungle's insects were unusually huge, caused by some unknown reason. One speculation said that during the dinosaur era, the insects on Earth were unusually big as well. Their size had something to do with the amount of oxygen concentration in the air. Apparently, the thicker the oxygen concentration, the bigger the creatures' size.

Jerry had learned of such knowledge in the books, but reality and theory were two different things!

For example, it might not cause much panic to happen across a mosquito that is the size of one's finger in real life, but a mosquito that is 2 palms big, now that is hair-raisingly scary.

Incidentally, bugs that were more than 2 palms big were hiding in every corner of the jungle. A few of them were like leeches; they lived off of blood. It was unknown whether they sucked other creatures' blood or if human blood was especially tasty to them.

Because of that, the troopers who had already removed their helmets put them back on after they stepped a bit deeper into the forest. Their bodies were fully covered, not a surface exposed. This carried on for 3 days and 3 nights. Even though the space armor had an impressive battery life, it couldn't support continuous 24-hour activation. They made some calculations in their heads and realized that the wastage couldn't possibly go on. The power of the armor was kept open during the day, but when they went to sleep at night, the suit powered down and the helmet had to be removed, or they would die from suffocation. Because of this, the troopers had developed a unique sleeping pattern. Following team leader Haweza's lead, they took some leaves and branches to smother their faces, leaving only 2 nostrils exposed when they slept.

Jerry was particularly unlucky that day. The leaves that covered his face had fallen off during the night. Half of his face was stung by an unknown insect and it was bloated, making it difficult for him to even speak.

Luckily, his immune system had already been upgrade by the Ultimate Vaccine. By afternoon, the swelling on his face subsided. However, this did help raise the alarm among the troopers. Haweza's advice that the Black Star Troopers had to be alert even during their sleep was forever imprinted in their minds.

That afternoon, the unit took down a 15-meter-long, 3-meter-wide gigantic creature with their cooperation. The creature was a crawling mammal with many legs. When Haweza cut open the creature and was in the middle of explaining its internal organs to the troopers, Jerry finally asked, "Leader, is the bulk of our training rolling around in the mud and battling these huge creatures and bugs? Shouldn't we practice marching? I remember

watching the Defense Unit marching all day long when they were on the Hope..."

Haweza was taken aback and explained with a smile after he cut out a fatty, white-colored piece of meat, "But we're the Black Star Troopers, they're the Defense Unit; we're completely different entities."

Another new trooper asked, "What's the difference? Aren't we both in the Barracks?"

Haweza pointed at his space armor and said, "The difference is this."

Then he picked up his sawblade and added, "This is also the difference."

Lastly, he pointed at the 14 people around him, saying, "All these are the differences."

"We are Homo Evolutis, do you know what that means? Not immense power or great status; for me, it only means one thing: the duty to protect mankind!

"We are the most powerful group of people among all human beings. With great power comes great responsibility. You must have heard of this line from books or movies; you might even think it's laughable, but that is the lesson I want all of you to learn."

Haweza raised his voice. "During the war with mother nest, who was the first to engage them in combat? It was us, the Black Star Troopers! Who were the ones caught in close combat with the alien monsters? It was us, the Black Star Troopers! Who came along to save the day when the war was almost lost? It was us, the Black Star Troopers! We are steel, we are unstoppable, we are humanity's saviors, and we must be fearless!"

Haweza paused and pointed at a young soldier. "Peter, you're most afraid of blood, but look at you now. You can eat bloody, uncooked meat without fear! Barnon, your phobia is bugs and insects. Now? You can squish them up and throw them into your mouth!

And you, you, you...

"Every single one of you are evolving! Do you realize that? Every day you're evolving into your better self. Plus, you will only appreciate civilization when you're away from one! Let me ask you: do you wish for a warm bath now? Take off your sweaty space armor and wade into a pool of warm water. After that, lie down on a comfortable mattress, without the fear of dangerous creatures and annoyance of giant bugs. Finally, a good night's sleep. Do you wish for that?"

14 men replied in unison, "Of course!"

Haweza nodded. "Me too. Then do you know who gave us all of these luxuries? Not Captain Yao Yuan. Of course, his leadership

has done wonders for humanity and we will be forever grateful for that, but he isn't omnipotent. He has many things to handle, and he can only take care of things that are on a bigger scale. With an understanding look, he will instill us with hope, but what about all these everyday warmths? Who gave us that?"

The troopers gave all kinds of answers; some said parents, others job, some even went as far as saying H-coins. Haweza waited until they finished before he announced, "Everything that you all have said can be summarized into one thing... Human civilization!"

"We human are communal creatures. We can't survive in isolation, because we'll be eaten alive by loneliness. And none of us is omnipotent. We need each other to ensure the continuity of humanity, so the one that gave us everything is human civilization!"

Haweza took another pause and he gritted his teeth as he continued, "Therefore, it falls unto our shoulders as Black Star Troopers to protect human civilization from all threats. This is a duty that we must complete even when our lives are at stake! Understood, kiddos? Now you all understand what bravery is and are no longer afraid of this forest. You have also learned how to listen to orders unquestioningly, but you still do not understand the weight of the responsibility on your shoulders.

We are humanity's last line of defense! Behind us are several tens of thousands of people, and they are the arc that will ensure the continuity of humanity. For your families, your parents, the people that you love, and people that love you, even if the order tells you to die, you have to die!"

There was a hint of viciousness that entered Haweza's voice when he continued. "I hope you remember the tale that I've told you about when Major Guang Zhen personally executed a Black Star Trooper. I was just standing behind him then. If Major Guang Zhen didn't do what he did, the Barracks would be greatly disappointed. Thankfully, Major Guang Zhen did what he did. It was better than I expected, it was wonderful. That is how humanity's last line of defense should act! You've been warned. I can stand for any mistake except abandoning the team during battle. Don't ever be a deserter.

"Or else don't blame my sawblade!"

His words gave the troopers quite a shock. They were silent the whole afternoon. They lied on a grass field cocooned in their own thoughts. A young trooper by the name of Peter sidled up to Jerry. He whispered, "Jerry, I heard your father is a scientist."

Jerry nodded. "You heard right. He is working on something related to new raw materials."

Peter commented, "My father is just a regular government servant, currently employed by the House of Representatives. But I guess I should count myself lucky. Every night when my father came back from work, he would bring myself, my mother, and my sister to the late night cinema. He would always complain about the film being shown, like how they were always the selected few, but he would sit through them just the same. Right, my sister is 5 years old now, and she was born on the Hope..."

Jerry replied enviously, "That's wonderful. I wish I had a sister myself, but I can't say I have it worse than you. Yes, my parents are a bit set in their ways, so much so that I couldn't stand living under the same roof as them, but now that I think about it, I wouldn't swap them for anyone else..."

"Yes, the Hope is a very good place now..."

Peter suddenly sat up straight, and he said seriously, "I want to be a qualified Black Star Trooper, I want to protect my family, so Jerry, will you be my witness. If the day comes when I falter from this ideal, I want you to cut me down with a slash!" He extended his balled fist at Jerry.

Jerry was silent before he too raised his fist and bumped it with Jerry's. The clash created a tingling metallic sound that attracted everyone's attention.

"I promise you, but I hope you will do the same for me as well."

"Okay!"

"We are steel! We are mankind's enemies' biggest nightmare! We will fight for humanity! We are fearless!"

Chapter 197: Super Species!

This was the sixth day of the troopers' training. They were preparing to return from the jungle. The training was quite useful since some of the newer troopers already had the steely gazes of actual soldiers. Haweza, who noticed, this was very satisfied, so he decided to have one week of such training every month to further improve the troopers' ability.

When they arrived at the forest fringe during dusk, they received a SOS message from the sixth Black Star Trooper unit. They were 5 hours away, but due to the treacherous path of the forest, they would need at least several hours to reach them.

What to do?

This was a question that was faced by every member of the ninth unit.

It was not that they didn't want to lend their hands, but the training was arranged to be one week long, and the power supply in their space armor was purposely calculated to only last that long.

Initially, they could be operated for 24 hours to ease the new cadets into training, but 2 to 3 days later, they had to be shut down during sleep and be only used during specific hours during the day. 6 days later, the battery levels of their suits of space armor was almost reaching rock bottom.

If they spent another 5 hours to rush to the scene, it would be one thing to just meet up, but another if there was combat involved. This meant that the space armors would run out of energy when they returned. The space armor weighed about 200 kilograms! Even putting it on needed help from 2 other workers. If the energy was spent, one had to be cut out from within. Without the protection of the space armor, the jungle would be a very dangerous place even for Homo Evolutis. Should they stumble into a dinosaur-like creature, the member count of their unit would most likely decrease.

This time even Haweza hesitated. Suddenly Jerry suggested, "Leader, if my memory serves me well, the 6th unit has 16 members, right? One of them is a female, and they have a bigger unit, so what kind of threat would force them to issue an SOS message? It must be quite serious, like the discovery of alien monsters planning to ambush our new capital or the tour crafts."

Haweza nodded in agreement. "What you're saying is highly possible. After all, we have no idea whether the alien monsters have been completely cleared. That's why the surveillance teams haven't stopped working... So, in your opinion, we should go?"

Another trooper piped up. "Of course. Fighting alien threat is the troopers' vocation. The issue of energy deficiency has a simple solution as well. Since the 6th unit has already sent the SOS message, I'm pretty sure the Hope will dispatch support shuttles as well. We'll just take those home."

Haweza gave it some thought and nodded firmly. "Then it's decided. We'll hurry to the scene. Everyone, check your equipment

carefully, and remember, this is no longer training! It might even be an actual fight with alien monsters! So be alert!"

The 14 men around him yelled loudly, "Yes, Sir!"

Haweza waved his sawblade forward. "Let's move out!"

Therefore, the 9th ninth rushed to the 6th unit's location. After 3 hours of silent trekking, they finally reached the battlefield where a bunch of trees had been fallen. It felt like a giant creature had stampeded through the area. "Alien," someone said under his breath.

Haweza didn't think so; he had combated the alien monsters before. There was a layer of slimy goop that covered the aliens' body, and their blood wasn't red. Incidentally, most of the animals on the planet had red-colored blood, so that made for an easy demarcation between the though. The place didn't have any alien carcasses nor slimy goop; what it had, though, were patches of bloody red spots.

Haweza signed a signal to his back, then the troopers surrounded him in a circle, their guns pointing outwards. He squatted down to inspect the liquid on the ground. He touched the liquid and spread it on a metallic slab on a part of his space armor. Very quickly, a window of numbers and words appeared before him. It was the blood's composition. Obviously, it wasn't human.

"It's a native animal." Haweza sighed as he stood up, but at that moment, he felt a sudden wave of malice assaulting him from the

top of his head. He kicked the floor and leaped back, carrying a few troopers with him. Like a small asteroid, something hit the spot he was squatting over with a resounding boom. All of the troopers were thrown out of formation. What followed next was a series of gunfire. A dark shadow weaved through the bullet trajectory before disappearing with a speed that couldn't possibly be caught by the naked eye.

Haweza stood up and stared at the spot he was previously at with a complicated expression. There was a small hole about half a meter deep. Some of the new cadets were still shooting, so he yelled, "Stop shooting! Stop shooting!"

Everyone stopped and the troopers regained their formation, but this time they paid extra attention to the sky.

Haweza's expression dimmed as he said, "It's a super species. The 6th unit crossed paths with this thing; no wonder they issued the SOS message."

The 14 troopers were confused, so one of them asked, "Leader, the super species isn't something you made up to scare us?"

Haweza answered with a straight face, "No, I didn't lie to you; this planet does have its own unique super species. They can even rival the alien monsters. No, they're more dangerous than the monsters because they have been shown to be able to take down a whole group of alien monsters. These super species are little in number and small in size; the biggest we've captured on video so far was only 1 to 2 meters tall, but their main food sources are the dino-sized creatures, and they are highly territorial. They will use

their lives to chase away trespassers."

Fear was written on the troopers' faces, but Jerry asked, "Leader, this means that the story about how the first, second, and third units being assigned to kill these super species is true as well? How many did they kill or capture? What did the Academy say about them?"

Haweza shook his head. "Unfortunately, so far we haven't been able to take down even one of these super species. They are like natural killers of the forest, and they're very sneaky to boot. Some of the scientists even believe that they have some form of rudimentary intelligence, because when they realize that the possibility of winning is low, they are clever enough to abandon their territory. This has made the capture effort incredibly difficult. The dense forest also nullifies a lot of our surveillance devices, and we, the Black Star Troopers, are hampered by that as well. So thus far, we are only able to chase them away and not capture them."

The new troopers were silent. Peter asked, "Leader, then what shall we do now?"

"...We move on," Haweza answered. "That super species must be keeping a close eye on us, waiting for us to make a mistake and then give us a fatal strike like how it did just now. However, I believe it is already wounded; the blood we saw should be its. Do not fear, because we are the Black Star Troopers. How can we be afraid of some beasts? Unit 6, let's carry on!"

"Yes, Sir!" the 14 men replied in unison.

As they marched on, Haweza used an isolated channel to communicate with Jerry. "Jerry, we are both perceptors so I want you to stay at the back of the group and I'll lead at the front. Keep your feelers up for the sting of malice. Can you do that?"

Jerry quickly replied, "Don't worry, I will get the job done, Sir!"

"... Be very careful, the claws of the super species are proven to be able to break through the space armor." Haweza dropped the advice as he moved to the front.

The unit moved forward carefully towards the 6th unit's signal's location. They sighed in relief when they saw the sheen of the space armor in front of them. Their footsteps fell faster. Suddenly, a cloud of malice surrounded them. It was acutely felt by both Haweza and Jerry. They lifted their rifles and aimed at the source of the malice.

To their consternation, a second spot of malice appeared right underneath them in the middle of their unit. Before the two of them could react, they saw a shadow clamp onto a trooper's ankle and drag him deeper into the jungle with lightning speed. Haweza was too far in front of the group to react, so it was Jerry who leaped onto the trooper's body to stop him from moving. Unexpectedly, the dragging force was so strong that the two troopers were pulled into the deeper recesses of the jungle. This whole event lasted for only 2 seconds; that was how fast the super species was. The forest was a cacophony of rushing footsteps and screams...

"I am steel! I am mankind's enemies' biggest nightmare! I will fight for humanity! I am fearless!"

Jerry yelled at the top of his lungs. He tried his best to pull himself upwards. He aimed at the shadow in front of him and pulled the trigger!

Chapter 198: Red Armor

When Jerry lifted his gun, he was given an unobstructed view of the super species that was chowing down on the trooper's leg. It was a scaly creature with a fusiform head and an elongated body not unlike that of a snake, only slightly wider in diameter. Underneath its body were six limbs that were used to move through the forest floor with unimaginable speed. It wasn't big, only 1.4 meters long, about the size of a small panther.

However, it had a strength that was not proportional to its small size. Two suits of space armor stacked upon one another had a total weight that was over one ton. It was not something a creature as small as a baby panther could drag around like a rag doll. But this super species not only dragged it around, it did it all with ease. With just few seconds, the two troopers were pulled away from the rest of the unit.

The creature seemed to sense that Jerry had lifted his gun. It suddenly bit down hard on the trooper's leg, and that sent a strong tremor down the trooper's body that had even Jerry shook. The muzzle of his gun moved and the shots were emptied into the air.

The trooper underneath him let out a blood-curdling scream. Jerry could see with his naked eye the blood pouring out of the wound on his leg. He was assaulted by both fear and shock, as he wasn't expecting the super species to be so strong. The space armor was the pinnacle of mankind's technology. Its shell alone could withstand focus fire of the Gaussian rifle for several minutes, and even the sawblade needed a few seconds to get through it. The fact that this creature managed to break through it with just its bite... Was the creature's bite powered by a polymerized reactor of some

kind? Were its teeth harder than diamonds? Its mouth muscle pure, hardened steel fibers?

Jerry's mind was addled. Even though Haweza had mentioned the presence of such super species, he didn't think they would be anything special; at most they would be like Earth's prehistoric dinosaurs but perhaps bigger in size. The alien monster massacre they came across... was probably a coincidence and luck on the super species' part.

Now, with the truth posed before him, Jerry had to admit to the scary threat of the super species. A killer instinct that was condensed within an unassuming small body; no wonder the few elite Black Star Trooper units were only able to chase them away and not exterminate them...

"Jerry! Saw my leg off! Just saw it off!"

Someone yelled. Jerry was rattled. He knew this voice. It was Peter's. As fate would have it, the trooper that was ambushed by the super species was Peter.

Jerry hesitated for a moment before tossing his gun away. He lifted his sawblade with one arm. Then came the buzzing of the vibrating saw as it was activated. Instead of aiming it at Peter's leg, Jerry yelled, "Peter! Try to sit up, and help me grab a chokehold on this thing! I'll try to kill it!"

Peter was stunned into silence before replying, "That's impossible, it's moving too fast. Plus, I'm feeling weak from the

waves of pain as I'm being dragged through the ground. I can't do this..."

Jerry interrupted him with a shout. "You freaking can! Believe me, you can! Don't you remember what you swore to me? You're not even afraid of death, but you're going to be beaten down by pain? Peter, sit up straight, you can do it!"

Jerry felt the man underneath him moving, and the struggle gradually increased. The power of his space armor activated accompanying his movement. The supermagnetic field heightened Peter's reaction time. With a loud roar, Peters sprang up into a sitting position and lunged at the super species with both hands.

The creature and Peter rolled into a ball of chaos. Jerry could feel the ground under his body moving. He had no suspicion that this creature could easily tear through Earth's old tanks, because just his tussle with Peter had leveled the trees in their surrounding area. 70 to 80 meters wide tree trunks were knocked down like dominoes. It was the battlefield that they saw when they approached the 9th unit's help signal. So that was what happened...

Jerry didn't join in the fight between Peter and the super species. He held onto his sawblade and stood his ground. He stared at a spot in the jungle with high alert, yelling, "Show yourself! I know you're in there, your malice can't be hidden from me. I know you can hear me. Even though you might not understand me, you certainly can see me. I'm standing alone here waiting for you! Come on! Show me your pride of being a super species and duel me!"

Deeper in the forest came the sound of trees falling. Slowly, a creature about two meters tall, also fully covered with black scales, looking like a black rhombus, materialized from within the forest. It had six legs, and on what appeared to be its head were four triangular eyes. They stared at Jerry piercingly.

The creature was exceptionally cautious. After it showed itself, it quickly scanned the surrounding to ensure that there was really only Jerry around. After it made certain of that fact, it tore open its spindly mouth that was filled with razor sharp teeth at Jerry, then a drum-like echo originated from within.

"Come get me, you beast!"

Jerry roared as he leaped at the creature, brandishing his sawblade. His speed increased as he jogged towards it since the space armor would automatically adjust itself based on its owner's physical condition. Jerry was a perceptor, the most combat ready Homo Evolutis, so when he charged forward, his speed was 180 meters per second because that was the speed the space armor calculated his body could support.

Alas, the super species was even faster. Jerry charged at it in a straight line, but with the collective force of its six legs, the creature leaped back into the deep forest's covers. With a speed that was unbelievable, it appeared on Jerry's side, knocking him away. As Jerry slammed into a tree, the creature charged at Jerry, trying to bulldoze him down. It slammed its entire weight into Jerry's body. Jerry felt his breath give. The creature wasn't finished. It clamped down hard on Jerry's hand that held the

sawblade. The crushing teeth cracked the space armor with ease and its teeth pierced into Jerry's bare hand.

Jerry screamed and he could feel his hand going weak as the sawblade dropped to the floor with a clink. While Jerry tried to grab hold of the creature's neck with his other hand, the creature sensed it and sidestepped out of the way cunningly. It then flung Jerry more than 10 meters away and stepped on the sawblade until it was merely metallic pieces, flaunting its victory.

In such a short battle, Jerry, who had the honor of being a Black Star Trooper, part of the strongest unit in the Hope, was handily bested by the creature. His hand was completely mutilated, and it had blood coming out it like a fountain. His Gaussian gun was lost in the middle of the jungle and his sawblade was completely shattered. In conclusion, he had no energy or resources left to combat the super species... The planet's super species were uncannily strong. How was it possible that a beast could manage to gain such impressive combat ability?

I lost...

Jerry sighed with surrender. At the same time, the smaller super species hauled Peter's broken body and tossed it beside him. Peter was in a worse condition than he was. His space armor was cracked at multiple spots and both of his arms were torn open. The man still had a breath left in him, but it was getting weaker by the minute. Peter had many open wounds on his body; if he was left to keep on bleeding, he would die in a matter of minutes. But what else could they do? They were completely at the two super species' mercy.

"Has my time arrived? Then..."

Jerry forced himself to stand up. His face grimaced from the pain and effort. However, there was no fear in his heart; it was as if he was welcoming death. He felt indescribably serene. Holding his broken arm, he stared straight at the two super species. He knew instinctually that the bigger among the two was a male. He wouldn't be so aggressive if unprovoked. Could this mean that...

All of this were for self-defense? Did something or someone hurt them first?

Jerry examined the bigger super species and realized that there was a gaping wound on one of his legs. It was obviously caused by a weapon. Could it have been a sawblade? Could he have destroyed the sawblade first because he knew it was a weapon strong enough to harm and even kill him? But who would be strong enough to harm a super species like him? Could there really be a trooper that could rival this super species' speed and strength?

The two super species stood silently by each other's side until the smaller one took small steps towards Jerry. Jerry was prepared to surrender to fate when a thunderous engine roar came from above the sky. Through the foliage, Jerry could see a shuttle speed past and a trooper in a flaming red space armor drop from the sky.

The two super species were spooked. They instantly escaped back into the deep forest. At that moment, Jerry got the vibe of... fear from them!

Chapter 199: The All-Rounder!

There was only one person who wore red armor in the entirety of Black Star Troopers.

Actually, the space armor had always had a paint job problem. This was due to the freedom of expression, exemplified by Earth's combat jets. The pilots liked to add changes to his or her vehicle's paint job as a memento, like adding a star after taking down an enemy craft or the like. Therefore, a small thing like paint was actually a point of contention within the Black Star Troopers.

Initially, the space armor's original color was silver with black, metallic accessories. However, the color silver was simply too eye-grabbing. The troopers' missions normally entailed them traipsing through space, and with the black color background, the silver space armor was pretty much asking for it to get shot at.

After a long and tedious discussion, grey, black, and green were eliminated for dark purple. Therefore, all of the space armors were awash in dark purple, and no exception was allowed. The only leeway was adding a sphere to represent Earth for team leaders and adding images of military insignia for those with military ranks.

The only non-purple armor was the red one owned by Captain Yao Yuan.

Therefore, the person who arrived was Yao Yuan. In fact, he came fresh from the discussion on the Deceiver with Ren Tao and Xiao Niao.

Other than the preliminary confirmation that the Deceiver could aid in Homo Evolutis awakening, they discussed its future possible uses. Of course, these were all speculations.

They also touched upon the uniqueness of the All-Rounder. If the All-Rounder was also a super grade S cosmic adapter, could he have some skills are that more powerful than the ability to use the weakened states of other Homo Evolutis skills at once? If not, the All-Rounder didn't really live up to the super S grade.

While they were in the midst of discussion, they received a message from the Hope's communication center. The sixth Black Star Trooper unit had issued a distress signal. During the short communication, they said they were ambushed by two super species and that three Black Star Troopers were severely injured. They needed emergency transport to get them back to the Hope.

The super species were native animals that were found on the new home planet after the mother nest war. Thankfully, during the initial sweep, none of the scouting party went deep into their territory, or they would have definitely been completely annihilated. In the end, they escaped with about 40 deaths.

After a series of aerial surveillance, they realized that the super species' territory was marked with alien carcasses with numbers reaching up to the hundreds. Using high-definition photo capturing, one could see that the cause of death for these monsters were the claw marks and bite marks all over their bodies. Through the magic of the electromagnetic scanning radar, only two slightly bigger native super species were found to occupy the area. In other

words, two wild beasts had taken down so many alien monsters?

This news was quickly relayed to the higher authority in the Barracks. This was scripted into high confidential clauses immediately and a heated debate ensued.

However, the shock this news brought to the Barracks was peanuts compared to how it had shaken the field of biology. Due to the severity of the issue, only the highest persons of interest were given intel, including Ivan and Saburo, but not to Bo Li due to the difference in her field of study.

The confidentiality clause was to prevent the news of such dangerous animals from creating havoc among the public.

This was something completely different from the alien. During the mother nest war, mankind used its own power to defeat the mother nest alien. The presence of such an alien instilled fear in people's hearts since the target was something concrete. There was something one could point at and say "this is the thing that makes me fearful." Therefore, to eradicate that fear, one only needs to remove the target causing it. The government's deforestation and monthly scanning might seem excessive to some, but they were carried out with the purpose to clear out the fear in people's hearts. They created a mirage that the government was actively handling the source of their fear, allowing them peace of mind.

But the feeling caused by the super species was not fear, but anxiety. It was something abstract; the anxiety of being attacked by animals was something ingrained in the evolution of mankind.

Since there was one such super species, there must be another stronger and scarier than it to bring balance to nature. They were the natives of this planet, and they were even stronger than the alien monsters, indestructible when facing the Defense Unit's Gaussian weaponry. Furthermore, they hid in the dark reaches of the forest, a place where they obviously had the upper hand.

Of course, mankind could survive in cities guarded by armies, electromagnetic security systems, a constant shuttle patrol, and Gaussian watch towers. But what different would that be from living in jail?

A small number of biologists tried to extrapolate the details of this super species based on the little information the Hope had compiled. First, the creature had high intelligence. Based on the aerial pictures taken, they showed that these creatures could already create handy products, like sharpened spears from wooden sticks, and even process dead bodies by airing them after dipping them in salt water. This proved that their intelligence was at least at the level of orangutans.

Ivan suggested the possibility of these beasts being resistant to the alien's cellular consumption effect. They might have some kind of unique DNA strain that prevented the alien from consuming them. This was why they could eat the alien monster meat.

They were also as territorial as tigers. They rarely wandered out of their territory and were highly territorial.

On a side note, the Ultimate Vaccine usable for the public that was Saburo's project had reached a bottleneck. There were zero breakthroughs in the past few months. The main reason was that the Ultimate Vaccine's most central activator was Component X. However, the effect of injecting Component X into normal citizens was an unknown and thus banned, so the research had reached stagnation. Even though the tour could tide the public's desire to visit the planet, if there was still no result on the vaccine front, things could get incredibly pressured for Yao Yuan.

Incidentally, the Hope came into contact with the super species then. Based on the fact that these super species could consume the alien meat without fear, it meant that their bodies had some natural resistance against the alien cell. Understanding this resistance could be the breakthrough Saburo needed.

Therefore, when the news came, for the sake of eliminating these super species and improving the vaccine research, Yao Yuan and Guang Zhen gave out the jungle survival training order. It was also a good opportunity to train the new troopers.

Of the 10 trooper units, 6 of them had contact with the super species. The number of these species was extremely low. Thus far, they only stumbled into 5 of them, and 3 had already been chased away from their nest. The troopers couldn't catch up to the beasts that were extremely familiar with the geographical condition of the forest, so they had to settle with evacuation and not elimination.

The only exception was this pair of male and female super species. They refused to leave their territory. Even after the joint

attack of multiple trooper units, they stayed. About 10 troopers almost died in combat. Two days ago, Yao Yuan himself led a team to lay siege to this pair, and he had managed to hurt the bigger male.

Unexpectedly, the pair left their territory and started ambushing other units. Before the distress message from the sixth unit, there had been other sightings and attacks reported by other units, but it was clear that the sixth unit had suffered the worst.

Yao Yuan didn't dare hesitate. He rushed to the hangar, put on his red space armor and rushed to the signal location. While he was flying through the air, his acute senses picked up a concentration of malice beneath him. He saw through the window an area of leveled trees. He immediately ordered the shuttle to decrease elevation. As long as the distance wasn't larger than 100 meters, the electromagnetic field generator inside the space armor would cushion the fall.

When he reached the scene, he saw two troopers there, one of them barely breathing and another with serious injuries. When he wanted to launch a counterattack, the two super species ran. Yao Yuan couldn't sense their malice anymore, so they must have retreated deep into the forest.

"Shuttle operator! I need assistance; we have someone seriously injured here!" Yao Yuan screamed into his communicator.

Then he ordered the trooper who was still standing, "Cut down the surrounding trees to create a landing spot for the shuttle!"

The trooper was stunned. Before breaking out an embarrassed smile, he said, "My weapons were ruined by that super species, I..."

Yao Yuan frowned and tossed him his own sawblade, yelling, "Go, now!"

The trooper accepted the sawblade with his unharmed hand and started sawing. In just a few minutes, about 100 trees in the area fell. He rushed back to Yao Yuan's side huffily, asking Yao Yuan, who was squatting beside the other trooper, "Captain, how-how is he?"

Yao Yuan examined the trooper quietly. He shone light into his eyes and saw that the trooper was expiring. His mouth was quavering. Yao Yuan moved his ear closer to his face and heard the whisper, "Cap, captain, please, give me... a last rite. I don't want to... die like this..."

Yao Yuan sighed inaudibly. He stood up and said seriously, "May God look over the soul of a young man who fought bravely on the battlefield to his last moment..."

The trooper closed his eyes, but there was a smile on his face as if he was relieved. Yao Yuan and the remaining trooper stood in silence. Suddenly, a strange feeling entered his heart. It was as if something deep inside him had gained an addition. More specifically, imagine there was a pocket inside Yao Yuan, and it was inserted with something extra.

Not only Yao Yuan, but the trooper beside him felt it. He dithered for a time before commenting, "Captain, I'm not sure whether this is appropriate or not, but I somehow felt his soul entering yours. No, it's more like his soul was pulled by the glorious glow of yours. I'm sorry, I don't know how to describe it; it was a weird feeling..."

"Yes, I feel it too."

Yao Yuan continued with a complicated expression. "It was as if an invisible pocket had opened up within me and his soul is residing within..."

Because Yao Yuan was an All-Rounder, he had access to Anima's skill, so he could see the light orbs that represented the Homo Evolutis. Even though he couldn't see the light spots that represented the normal people, from what the few other Animas told him, in the soulweb, normal citizens were represented by light spots that were smaller in size and brightness compared to the light orbs that represented the Homo Evolutis. The biggest one among them was his own, a fireball several hundred times bigger than normal orbs. Like the sun, it radiated warmth and light in the soulweb.

Why would his own light orb be so huge? Could it have something to do with the reason the All-Rounder was a super S grade cosmic adapter alongside the Deceiver?

Yao Yuan believed he had stumbled across the answer then...

When he submerged into the soulweb, he could see a small orb

circling his own giant fireball. The light orb wasn't distinguished, it was kept alive by the warmth of his own fireball!

Chapter 200: Taming and Breeding

Yao Yuan was shell-shocked.

The conclusive fact that human beings had souls alone had overthrown his more conservative thinking. How is it that life had so-called souls?

While it was true that the Anima could see the presence of light orbs, this phenomenon could be scientifically explained as some sort of visual manifestation of intuition, mental concepts, brain waves, or even life energy.

But could science explain the human soul? That would be impossible!

However, now was not the time for all that. Yao Yuan straightened himself and told the young trooper beside him, "Temporarily keep this thing to yourself. By the way, what's your name?"

The trooper's answer tumbled out in a hurry. "Cap, Captain, my name is Jerry..."

The young man was starstruck, so even his speech was affected.

Yao Yuan patted his shoulder encouragingly. "You did well. You didn't abandon your comrade even against something as powerful as the super species. You deserve a good rest. Take this transport

shuttle back to the Hope. We can now perform good organ reconstruction surgery, so don't worry about that arm of yours."

Jerry was once again stunned. He asked hurriedly, "Then what about Captain? Do you plan to..."

"Yes, I plan to pursue the two super species."

Yao Yuan didn't plan to be secretive, so he explained clearly, "The two creatures are too dangerous. They have a deep-seated hatred towards mankind because we've injured them. For some reason, they won't leave this slice of jungle and keep ambushing our men left and right. This place is too close to our capital; it's still manageable now, but after the migration, their presence will be scarier than an actual alien monster army.

"Therefore, we have to dispatch them, or at least chase them away. Furthermore, the mass release of the Ultimate Vaccine might need the blood and DNA of these creatures, so I'll try to catch a live one."

Yao Yuan smiled at Jerry. "Don't underestimate me, I'm the Black Star Trooper's general after all. I've managed to hurt these two beasts before, so I'm sure I will eventually get the job done. Plus, I won't be attempting this alone; there are at least 4 other trooper units around. I've left a trail for them to follow. Alright, that's all the time I have, or the trail will get cold."

Yao Yuan took back his sawblade from Jerry and bolted into the jungle. Like a flame, Yao Yuan zipped through the trees, leaving

behind Jerry, Peter's body, and the shuttle that was still circling for a suitable place to land.

Jerry silently watched Yao Yuan disappear into the forest. After some time, he squatted down beside Peter and drew a cross on his forehead, adding, "Lucky you, your soul has found a home. So that's the truth behind the calling, it's a calling from home..."

On the other side, Yao Yuan activated his diviner power and ran down the direction that sent off the most danger. He could sense the danger source dashing through the forest with incredible speed. Yao Yuan was sure that the danger was coming from the two super species.

The super species had power and speed that were not proportional to their size. Their bodies were extremely hardy as well; they could rival the tensile strength of reinforced super alloy. Even though they couldn't completely block the penetration of Gaussian weaponry, they could greatly decrease their damage and effectiveness. It was tough, even by the sawblade's standard. That was why Yao Yuan had only managed to hurt one of them but not kill it.

The reflex speed of these super species was incredibly fast. If put into numbers, it would be akin to a reaction time of 305 meters per second. This was much higher than almost all of the Black Star Troopers, almost double the reaction time of the trooper in fact! It was a scary difference. A small variation in reaction time could give a decided advantage in combat, much less a difference that was so wide.

Among all the Black Star Troopers, only Yao Yuan could stand head-to-head with them. It was why Yao Yuan had to pursue this threat himself.

Furthermore, he had a speculation he needed to prove...

The previous three super species that they stumbled into, no matter their gender, were independent survivors. They would abandon their territory when they realized that their opponent was too strong. This pair of male and female super species was the exception. There was also another anomaly when it came to this unique pair of super species. They killed quite a number of alien monsters to dry and store their meat even though the amount was obviously more than enough to feed two super species...

Could it be...

Because of his suspicions, Yao Yuan didn't catch up to the two beasts and kill them immediately, he tailed them from a safe distance. He kept up a constant communication with the other units. He ordered them to keep a perimeter around the two super species' territory and not join him in the chase.

Yao Yuan tailed the two super species for more than 10 hours. Since the space armor had an internal air circulatory system, he was not afraid the two beasts could pick up his scent. He was, however, feeling the beginning of fatigue from using his Homo Evolutis skill for so long.

After he confirmed that he had become a Level 2 All-Rounder,

during his daily training, Yao Yuan realized that his mastery over Homo Evolutis skills had almost doubled, and so did their effectiveness. They were still not as strong as their respectively pure forms, but Yao Yuan was content.

After more than 10 hours of continuous tracking, the speed of the two super species finally slowed down. They shifted in direction and headed towards a spot by the edge of their territory. Yao Yuan ignored his growling stomach and followed patiently. The goal was near, so he couldn't give up now. The two super species finally stopped several hours later and stayed at that spot for more than one hour. Yao Yuan immediately ordered the surveillance shuttle to mark down the location. He stopped pursuing the super species, retreated to a safe location, and called for a shuttle back to the Hope.

After food and rest, the fully recovered Yao Yuan took Ying and Liu Bai to the marked location on the next day's afternoon.

Soon, they arrived at the location. After about 10 minutes of trekking, the three entered a seemingly normal swamp. Without Yao Yuan's orders, Ying used his Seeker power to memorize every inch of the scene.

"Look, there are slight footprints here. Something must be hidden underneath this clump of dried branches and roots since the two super species spent a lot of time pacing around this area!" Ying confirmed, pointing at an inconspicuous bump on the ground.

Yao Yuan signed a signal, telling them to be careful before

inching forward to the suspicious bump. He used his Diviner power to scan the area, but there was no sign of danger. He carefully swept the branches and leaves away. He was surprised to find a structure that was like an upturned bowl. The space in the middle was only enterable from below. It was an interesting find, not unlike a beaver's dam but more intricate in design.

Yao Yuan cracked open the nest and found within a mouse-like creature squeaking. It was the size of half an adult's palm. It was white as snow, and the black scale that would eventually envelop its body was still undeveloped. Like its adult variation, it had 6 appendages, two of them had already grown claws. The little creature still hadn't opened its eyes, but the sudden exposure to the rush of air made it squeak in curiosity.

"The nature of a parent sure is impressive; even the alien species is not excluded from it. They are raising their offspring here, no wonder they are reluctant to leave their territory." Yao Yuan scooped the little creature carefully up in his palms. Liu Bai, who stood beside him, rushed over with a glass case that was equipped with multiple machineries within. It was a germ-free case. It didn't carry any viruses or microbes from Earth. The most it would have were the germs from this planet that escaped into it when it was opened, so it should be fine to contain this junior super species.

Liu Bai brushed the little creature carefully with a germ-free napkin before sliding it carefully into the case. Then he nodded at Yao Yuan.

Yao Yuan spoke into the communicator, "Transport shuttle, send down a rope ladder immediately. I can feel the two super species

coming our way."

Yao Yuan's warning was unneeded because the people on the shuttle could see a patch of forest further away suddenly coming crashing down. Obviously, the two super species were ramming their way towards them. Therefore, they released the rope ladder quickly. The three hopped on and the shuttle lifted off.

When the shuttle reached a 200 meter elevation, a black object shot up like a cannon into the sky using some of the taller trees as purchase. However, it only reached about 140 meters in height before crashing back down to earth. What followed was a blood curdling scream, one that was as impressive as the beating of war drums!

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